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DISCUSSION BOOKS

General Editors :

Richard Wilson, D.Litt., and A. J. J. Ratchff, M.A.

THE MATURING MIND

No. 1

THE MATURING MIND

by

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THOMAS NELSON AND SONS LTD

LONDON EDINBURGH PARIS MELBOURNE

TORONTO AND NEW YORK

First published in this series, September 1938

TO
HAROLD PILKINGTON TURNER
TO WHOM ADULT EDUCATION OWES
MORE THAN THIS BOOK CAN EXPRESS

PREFACE

IN the preface to a book it is usual for the author to give reasons for writing it. I have here attempted to fill certain gaps in the psychological picture of man's development. For reasons beyond my control my early books described and discussed the failure of human beings to meet the demands of their social environment, and the distortions, both of experience and conduct, which manifested this failure. After this, it was natural to study normal people, particularly workers and athletes. Becoming interested in the methods which learners employ to gain knowledge, I realized that though much school and University training teaches people either to put ink on paper or to interpret inky patterns, most successful social adjustments depend upon speaking, and this became the subject of later books.

The present one emphasizes the importance in mental development of learning to discuss, and depicts stages in the process of achieving mental maturity. I did not realize fully how interesting this problem was until I came to write about it, and hope that some of this interest will be communicated to the reader.

I am grateful to Mr. A. J. J. Ratcliff and to Dr. Richard Wilson for suggesting the book ; to the Editors of the *British Journal of Educational Psychology* and of the *Radio*

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Times for permission to incorporate, often in paraphrase, matter from their publications ; to Mr. Donald Boyd of the British Broadcasting Corporation for data which form the background of Chapter VII. ; and to Miss Jeanne Bally and Mr. L. B. Yates for valuable help in the preparation of the typescript.

T. H. PEAR.

THE UNIVERSITY,
MANCHESTER.
March 1938.

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CHAPTER I

THE WISDOM OF BEING EDUCATED

THERE has been a great deal of talk and writing lately about Adult Learning and Adult Education. This book may increase that amount, but from a relatively new direction. Tastes notoriously differ, but there are certain words which, when many people read them, arouse no enthusiasm, no enmity, only a dull, flat refusal to read further at the moment. To such readers the word "adult" suggests stability, complacency, dullness; and "learning" evokes unpleasant ideas of effort and feelings of inferiority. "Education" suggests mental pictures of schools; not always pleasant ones. As a result, combinations of these terms are even more unattractive. However decorous one's excuses for neglecting to read about these subjects, one's soliloquy proceeds along lines like these: "I am grown up. Why expect me to learn anything more with alacrity when I've spent most of the last twenty years in learning? The word 'education' is gloomy, and educationists can't even agree about its modern meaning, except when, combining to

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assert that it should form character, they omit to specify the kind. I have my work in the daytime ; for my leisure there are walks, swimming, tennis, dances, cards, golf, the ' pictures,' and, if I'm feeling unsociable, the radio and novels."

We have not specified the type of person from whom these deplorable remarks are supposed to be proceeding, except to imply that he, or she (and this distinction is important), is an adult. There may be relatively few adults shut off from all the leisure-activities mentioned above ; yet age, poor health, lack of money or of friends, debar many people from most of them.

What comments can be made upon these statements by one who believes that attractive adult education is possible after 25 ? I have attempted to make some of them in this book for the consideration of readers of both sexes between the ages of 21 and 85. For reasons which will soon appear, these chapters deal specially with the age-range of 25 to 60 ; particularly with the lower end of this range, for in this country at least, on reaching 25 the young adult finds that nobody in particular seems to care about his *intellectual* development. At the moment his bodily fitness is said to be a matter of public interest, and not a few organizations, if allowed, will interest themselves in his moral welfare. Yet there is no reason, except neglect, why his intellectual and cultural development should cease at 25.

One aim of this book is to describe the interest and attractiveness of acquiring knowledge after one is 25

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with modern resources. These are newspapers, books, the radio, discussion circles, adult classes, and even, at a few times and in a few places, the cinema. But the word "knowledge" is also apt to produce a faint headache if one meets it unawares. As used here, it will include acquaintance with things or subjects as well as deeper comprehension. One may be acquainted with first-class music or pictures, though with little knowledge. Few are the worse for such acquaintance. It might amuse or annoy Mr. Bernard Shaw, if the unimportant information ever came his way, to hear how a certain young man who, seeing "House Full" boards outside a musical comedy theatre in the Strand, crossed the road to enjoy, for the first time, a Shaw play, and was never the same again. In this instance acquaintance without knowledge was better than no acquaintance.

A certain school of thought proclaims that knowledge is useless unless put into practice. Expressed in that way it may seem a platitude. It was perhaps timely advice before Mr. Henry Ford and his English colleagues had made every one want to be somewhere else, before Herr Hitler had found that the secret of happiness lay in marching somewhere or other and digging something or other, and before the exquisite beauty of the phrase, "going places and doing things" had haunted our ears. But is not some education necessary to help people to sit still for a moment? William James urged us, when we are moved by a great concert, not to let the emotion fade, but to let it pass into action, to give up our seat in the

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street car or to speak kindly to our aunt. Perhaps Professor James was thinking of robust, uplifting music ; does his counsel help the listener entranced by *L'Après-Midi d'un Faune* ?

This is by no means the only controversial subject in the present book. It suggests that we should either use the word " culture " fearlessly, or find some new word. England, for example, is no longer " The Land without Music." Does not this fact represent a cultural improvement ?

A belief which led to the writing of this book is that for any democratic pattern of society to survive, an absolute necessity is free discussion. Many in our country regard this as a right. Yet questions will be raised concerning the degree to which our present systems of education fit our countrymen to take part in such free discussion ; and upon this theme the book will be focused.

CHAPTER II

WHY LEARN AFTER TWENTY-FIVE ?

THIS chapter will offer some account of what happens to people who, after 25, subject themselves to certain influences now to be described. "Learning" may be the only proper term for them. Yet to many it suggests a submission to discipline suitable for children, or a chastening of the flesh deliberately chosen ; and this, except in military training, is not the chief aspect of adult learning. The threat "I'll larn you" implies a process of teaching from which all normal grown-ups regard themselves as emancipated.

Amongst psychologists, too, the term "learning" has acquired a grim sound. To some it signifies "the acquisition of measurable improvement as the result of repeated practice." Possibly the development of this concept was due to the convenience it offers to an experimenting psychologist. If learning can be measured satisfactorily, scientific methods are applicable to its problems. But to conceive all learning so narrowly excludes many of its most attractive and significant features ; for example, awakening, development and satisfaction of interest, widening and deepening of the

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awareness of self, increase in the power of personality and stabilization of character. Many important abilities which can be learnt profitably after 25, are measurable only with difficulty, if at all. Manners, poise, knowledge and understanding of other people and other peoples, tolerance, ability to express thoughts in speech as well as in writing ; these are only a few.

In 1930 I wrote a book, *The Art of Study*,¹ chiefly for readers of school-leaving age. In it were described some bodily and mental events termed "learning." They were :

1. Linking up a simple form of behaviour with the perception of a simple situation, e.g. using a slot-machine to get chocolate.
2. Understanding ; grasping relationships between things, e.g. seeing more than one reason why short Channel routes from England to the Continent are dearer than longer ones.
3. Acquiring muscular skills suitable to certain situations, e.g. swimming well if thrown out of a boat or apologizing suitably for a mistake. (Many people find the second skill harder to learn.)
4. Feeling appropriately at certain moments in ways which are not instinctive and must be acquired by experience, e.g. being able to perceive other people's sensitiveness, to praise without patronizing, to blame without searing the blamed one's emotions.
5. Being able not only to make finer perceptual

¹ London : Kegan Paul.

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distinctions than the unlearned can do between things seen, heard, touched, and tasted, but also to respond to the things distinguished with more delicate discrimination and graduation.

For this acquired condition of mind and body there is only one word—"culture," and in England reluctance to use it is widespread. For this ban there are several reasons. One was the use, from 1914 to 1918, both by German and anti-German propagandists, of the term *Kultur*, which meant something else. And, once the professional propagandist, of whatever nationality, has twisted a word's meaning for a few years, ordinary writers feel like making him a present of it, or putting it aside like a warped tennis racket, in the hope that it will be straightened. Let us, using the word again, say that a most attractive feature of learning after 25 is that it brings culture.

The sense in which the word will be used is illustrated in *The Art of Study* (pages 3-4) :

"You have the chance now, and not thirty years hence, of becoming an epicure of knowledge. Why not ? Conversation, scenery, pictures, music, sport, all give you pleasure now. But you must have met persons who find many different kinds of pleasure in even one of these types of experience ; who know where to look for them, and to find these pleasures at their best ; who know when to enjoy them ; who can see, hear, or ' think ' them in their cultural setting. You can learn some of these

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desirable things if you rove about and accidentally meet people. But chance may not bring you joy in a Rembrandt and a Corot, in Mozart and Debussy, will not make you a friend of Hans Sachs in the *Meistersinger*, may not suggest the pleasure of seeing an Adam house. For all these joys require some mental background. To paint it in is the dream of many a grown-up who, till now, has had—or thinks he has had—no time for it. You have the chance, and the time. . . .

“If you are still unconvinced, ask some one aged fifty-five, who ‘knows what is what,’ where you can see good pictures and hear fine symphonies and operas, who are the best living builders, writers, speakers, stage and film actors, and where you can get interesting meals, artistically and cheaply cooked. (Even if you are out of reach of many of these joys you will be no worse for knowing where they can be found.)

“Now ask how long it took him to learn about these things. Did he discover them casually, as water runs downhill, or was he helped by friends, books, guides, and maps? There is room in modern life not only for guides to knowledge but also for advice about the process of getting that knowledge.”

A moment ago it was implied that culture rendered one capable of discriminating between situations and of graduating the response to them. If to these acquirements be added the ability to interpret the results of discrimination, and to graduate the response in the light of judg-

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ments about the respective values of things, we have a psychological description of culture.

It is difficult to write about culture ; every argument for consciously seeking it suggests a counter-argument. The conversations in Sinclair Lewis's *Dodsworth* express both inimitably, with vivid illustrations. I know how petulant, bullying or finicky a writer may seem when he expresses his belief that the average man or woman would be happier if he were more cultured. The natural reaction is to quote the more snivelling of the intellectuals' complaints about life. And yet many students in adult classes offering non-vocational subjects often do not want to learn, in the narrow sense quoted on page 15. They show little desire to achieve "measurable improvement as the result of repeated practice." They wish to understand, to appreciate. Just as few English who visit France learn to cook, but many to appreciate good food, these students learn to delight in the flavour of knowledge. If the austere, full-time intellectual thinks this a flabby ideal, he might remember that many adults who seek knowledge in the evenings are dog-tired with being useful all day.

We can now ask some simple but important questions. What do adult learners want ? Why ? Do they get what they want ? What do they not get ? Two more questions which cannot be answered here (though there is no harm in asking them) are : Ought adult-learners (morally, legally, financially) to be able to get this education ? And who ought to give it ?

CHAPTER III

WHAT DO ADULT LEARNERS WANT ?

WHAT do those who desire adult education really want ? Until recently data for an answer would have had to come from what one had noticed oneself and heard from friends and colleagues, casually or at conferences. In 1936, however, Mr. W. E. Williams and Professor A. E. Heath published *Learn and Live*.¹ In it is a vast collection of answers to questions "reflecting the educational life-histories of over 500 members of adult classes, from the most varied occupations and areas."

I will give, in paraphrase, some replies which illuminate my own choice of themes. (The omitted parts may be of equal if not greater importance, and every one interested in adult learning is advised to read the whole book).

What motives impel "working" men and women to seek further education ? The chief appear to be two, which, though different, are not necessarily opposed. The first is the desire to enrich the individual personality ; the second, to help to improve this disordered world. Some people seek further education to discover private

¹ London : Methuen.

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fields of interest ; others expect it to make the world fitter for democrats to live in. One comment upon the aim of developing a balanced personality is particularly thought-provoking ; the main purpose of adult education is " to create a state of mind that can be at rest without a toy." This, however, is by no means the wish of the majority ; culture in a vacuum of leisure is abhorred by most of those who gave the answers in *Learn and Live*.

The adult learning to be discussed in the present book is non-vocational ; it helps nobody, at least directly, to earn more money or to get promotion. What, then, are the reasons for desiring it ? It affords a diversion, an escape from ordinary work. Its effect is tonic. It helps to restore balance to lives condemned to strict, often dull routine. Free from the incentive of competition, it appeals to many who find such a motive distasteful.

Many adult students remember their own primary schools, where competition was fiercer then than it is to-day. But few of these students have experienced intellectual team-work, the free sharing of knowledge without regret at parting with a valued possession. Even to-day, for several reasons, some of them good, children are usually forbidden to help each other with home-work. Whether this produces a permanent possessive, secretive attitude towards knowledge, so that intellectual activities acquired in later life are similarly regarded, nobody can say. The chief factors in such " spread " may be personal peculiarities. Yet an outstanding merit of adult education

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is that it develops a sense of fellowship. English readers might notice that this sense is acquired while getting knowledge, supplementing the comradeship learned in a more usual manner on the playing-field. Intellectual team-work is relatively new and not particularly widespread, even in universities, where the naïve might suppose it to flourish spontaneously.

It may be possible to extend adult education in this co-operative direction. One way is suggested by the recent encouragement of ordinary intelligent people to observe and record the everyday social events around them.

What are the defects of adult education? The most serious complaint about non-vocational education seems to be that it lacks defined objectives; it is "vague and aimless," "gets you nowhere," "has a beginning but no conclusion."

Even if the most obvious reasons for these complaints proved to be correct, a psychological investigation of them would be valuable. Yet the complainants, through no fault of their own, may misconceive the nature of adult education. Any one who has studied for years in competitive spirit, dominated by the aim of passing examinations, who has "swotted" (loathsome word) only "subjects" which can be sold for examination marks, who has made only those lecture-attendances which get him a certificate—even if economically compelled to do these things may have been stunned as a result. Only a few of such mentally bruised casualties

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seek adult education, but the opinions described above may be theirs.

Possibly, however, this attitude results in part from habits learned in childhood. Certain places in the house, certain times of the day, are often intimately associated with hard study. Even if an unusually interesting book is obviously useful to me, I often have a sense of guilt if, during term, I read it early in the day. The underlying belief seems to be that at such a time I ought to "work" at something "difficult." The possibility that when reading such a book I am working, though pleasantly, or even that the book is difficult if not obscure, seldom occurs to me until later. Yet a student over 25 ought to be able to enjoy the acquirement of knowledge without a guilty feeling, which, though it may inspire some hard work, clouds the enjoyment of a great deal more. Psycho-analysts have views about this, some of which are considered on pages 56 to 63.

Apart from educational considerations, the question is of general interest. People who come from sunny climes to work in the friendly but grey and grim industrial North of England describe a guilt-feeling which makes it hard to be lazy "up north," but easy when they go south again. It is reasonable, too, to ask how much actual laziness is possible at Blackpool during the crowded season. Perhaps many holiday-makers pay a large proportion of their money to travel to places where laziness does not make them feel guilty. Is this due to conditioned responses ? Possibly, in part, but

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the earnest or gay spirit of a place is often difficult both to describe and to explain.

However the opinions upon this subject may have been formed, the views are clearly expressed. Students record a difficulty in creating "that zeal and enthusiasm which infuse vocational courses." Non-vocational learning may produce a self-culture which they stigmatize (perhaps hastily) as sterile, and "a false assurance and self-importance." It may be admitted that false assurance shows itself in adult education, yet vocational training, too, may lead to false assurance about matters outside the particular vocation—and, occasionally, inside it. The student who, after reading a few books, reiterates that the "real" interpretation of history is always economic may annoy his fellows, but he might be easier to tolerate in an evening class than the famous engineer (his vocational training was quite successful) who told the world that "History is bunk."

The opinion of consciously-uncultured about consciously-cultured people is psychologically interesting. Occasionally it expresses regret for missed chances, sometimes coloured by indignation against the society that has denied the opportunities. Sometimes it is caused by jealousy, or by envy expressing both admiration and hatred for the lucky ones. To a jealous person the sight and sound of some one who has been to foreign places, done interesting things, particularly those requiring expensive gear, met interesting people, especially those with famous names, is infuriating. The emotion is not

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always expressed simply. It may disguise itself under a plain man's natural objection to bragging, however subtle. Yet, though it has merits, this "come off it!" attitude can be very tiresome to the plain one's friends. A teacher's suspicion that his audience resents allusions which are not local, or at least national, may cause him to omit all mention of anything unusual which he has personally experienced. His addresses then become modest as the violet, but greyer in hue.

Our national "ambivalent" attitude to culture is exploited by several English humorists; the one and only P. G. Wodehouse being in the van. Perhaps an example of less playful ambivalence is afforded by the popularity of the word "highbrow," described by one writer as "an ominous addition to the English language," and dismissed by another with the comment, "After all, height of brow distinguishes man from the ape."

Objections to "highbrow stuff" may have a complicated background, and the credentials of any one using the phrase seriously should be carefully examined. We should not forget that some adult students seek culture, even polish, for its own sake. An old lady who terminated some newspaper correspondence about "radio announcers' English" by "I hope it won't be changed. After all, one meets so few gentlemen nowadays," expressed a tenable if annoying preference.

One adult student writes, "Adult education which lacks the stiffening that arises from the need to fit oneself for one's work, and the driving-force given by the urge

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to material advancement, may become wishy-washy and too high-falutin' ; may generate warm, pleasant emotions and sheer off from intellectual discipline."

Commenting upon this, Williams and Heath observe that many students drift in a sluggish current, where their own impulse is too feeble to exert itself, towards some Sargasso Sea of "culture." These authors urge the risk of "losing steerage-way and compass bearings" ; and say that, whatever the end of a vocational voyage may be, it is at least reached by positive navigation. There is room, however, for another point of view. It is right to infuse some grace into life, to know and tolerate a few activities of which one may say that, though real, they are not very earnest, and the job is not their goal. Before the adult student has reached his evening class, or listened to a radio programme, life may have been real and very earnest for him for ten solid hours. Perhaps all day he has displayed virtues which some equally earnest but less hardworking people would like him to acquire in the evening. The doctrine "an ounce of doing is worth a pound of appreciating" may not apply to his off-time interests, for in the daytime he is certainly a doer. This ought to be remembered when surveying the field of adult education, even if it includes music, concerning which the above proverb is quoted so often. One has met musicians who play an instrument with much enjoyment to themselves and to others, yet seem unable to appreciate music in general. I knew a middle-aged professional musician in a great city who

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had never been to a Gilbert and Sullivan opera, and could not understand his friends' enthusiasm for it. Why listen to Sullivan, he might ask, when one can play Bach ? He is entitled to his opinion, but many adult students desire intensely to appreciate music better, even if they seldom have the time, money, energy or opportunity to make music.

These comments do not cover the subject. The relationship between enjoyment of an artistic effect, and appreciation of the technique implied in its production still offers problems. Professional painters, musical composers, dancers, even after-dinner speakers often grasp how their colleagues produce certain effects, but it is doubtful whether this necessarily increases their pleasure, or if vivid enjoyment of a performance is impossible without appreciation of its technique. Even with scanty ideas about the ways in which men paint a picture, build a baroque church, or write a tone-poem, one may enjoy these creations. At least I do ; though, with little likelihood of getting lessons in painting, church building, or musical composition, I may risk being lost in a Sargasso Sea of culture. Even then I shall have seen the sea. Perhaps one student feels this when he writes that only when you know that it isn't going to get you another pound a week, can you get the real nourishment out of adult education.

A thought-provoking suggestion is that by explaining life, adult education might dissolve some of its boredom and its insignificance. " Even if it continues to be a hell

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of a life, the inhabitant of Hell may find it less intolerable if he learns something about its history, its chemistry, and its social customs." If this were done, it is urged, "fewer fake-expectations would arise," and many students would be contented, "since 'getting-on' is a phase of nineteenth-century history that has done, and is still doing, much mischief, with the disillusionment of wider knowledge." An excellent subject for a discussion circle!

The appearance of these opinions will check some writers who dogmatize about adult students' needs without realizing their diversity. It proves that "the consumers take their learning very seriously. . . . We still breed men and women who will endure much to gain a little knowledge." This should be said oftener. Many of the Workers' Educational Association tutors must often have silently admired the courageous, self-sacrificing pursuit of knowledge by their pupils.

Having stated that the benefit of education after 25 need not consist in making the learner better able to do, or retain, his job, but may help in other directions, particularly by increasing his culture, we anticipate the question: "But does it make people happier?" When our authors asked this, the ayes had it by a majority of 18 to 1. A married woman answered: ¹

"It has not only given me more confidence in myself, but I am myself—I have an individuality of my own. It has made me understand my husband better; there is more comradeship in our lives, more give and take, more freedom for both of us."

¹ *Op. cit.*, page 83.

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In reply to the question, " Would you do it again ? " the ayes again have it. Yet with the statement of this conviction comes a further one ; a social system is imperfect if it compels them to seek education so late in life. The young, it is urged, must not be lost between the years of 14 and 20.

By now it should be clear that I admire *Learn and Live* considerably. It will, therefore, not be regarded as destructive criticism to mention a significant fact, that not until page 99 is there any mention of the difficulties for the relatively uneducated English adult, which proceed from the fact that when he is in unusual social surroundings he can seldom speak as easily or as effectively as people who have had example or training in good speech. It is doubtful if enough help in this direction is given by our institutions for adult education.

One student expresses the need thus :

" Frankly I envy the sons of *some* middle-class people. Brought up in comfortable, cultured households, they have had room to expand ; their minds and their gestures have not been contracted by limitations of space, money, and education. They have self-possession and correct speech, free of the worry as to what is good grammar, they conduct themselves with ease and grace, and they show, without ostentation, consideration for the opinions and whimsies of others. These things really do count."

The existence of this gap in most parts of our educational system having been mentioned, discussion of it will be postponed until pages 87 to 115.

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So far we may seem to have regarded the adult as if, when not attending classes, he always lived alone or in lodgings. He may, of course, have parents, brothers and sisters, a sweetheart, husband, wife, children, or grandchildren, and any of these may be an impetus, help, or obstacle to his success in securing or benefiting by adult education. In the investigation we have been considering these personal relationships were not forgotten. The answerer was asked if engaging in educational activities had had any personal consequence in his relations to his family. It was necessary to distinguish two meanings of "absence from home"; absence for one or two nights a week in the winter to attend a class, and absence for a year to reside in a distant college.

It was found that the acquisition of a new educational interest by a husband, when his wife is debarred from it, is particularly likely to cause matrimonial conflict, for reasons easy to imagine. Many instances were reported where a husband had had a proselytizing success with a wife, but seldom has the effect been the other way. Sometimes the wife comes to a class because she does not want to be left behind, "yet what begins as an act of wifely sympathy—or precaution—seems often to develop into an autonomous interest." The evidence makes it impossible to doubt that "unilateral experiences of education" within the family have created discords, yet it shows that where the new experiences have been shared family harmony has increased.

One cannot indict a nation, though Mr. H. G. Wells

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nearly did so when at the meeting of the British Association for the Advancement of Science at Nottingham in September 1937 he criticized the teaching of history in schools. Whatever be the ultimate verdicts upon his attacks, some adults who gave answers for *Learn and Live* were very dissatisfied with the teaching they had received in history and allied social subjects. Objection was raised to the "shoddy nationalistic presentation" of the subjects. It is useless to cry over spilt milk, yet these opinions deserve to be noted seriously as well as the following :

A major pleasure of obtaining knowledge with no ulterior motive, like that of passing an examination, is the feeling that one is not penned in by the boundaries of "subjects." "At school," as one answerer put it, "each subject came after a sudden break. One had mentally to switch off, put the mathematics away, and switch on to English in the twinkling of an eye. The same with chemistry and physics." It may be added that year-long execution of this grasshopper's dance many times a day leads to the belief in many adults that the subjects they learned at school are really separated. In any case this mosaic presentation makes it difficult for them to see that an event belonging to one "subject" is likely to crop up in several others.

The thirty-three year old student whose opinion is quoted above is criticizing not only the schools of twenty years ago, but both the schools and the universities of to-day. In universities the divisions not only between

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subjects, but between sub-sections of a subject, continually become higher and more difficult to surmount.

The answers show a keen desire for discussion and for training the pupil to express himself in public. These topics will be discussed in Chapter IX.

CHAPTER IV

AM I TOO OLD TO LEARN ?

FOR centuries men have made statements, sonorous if not profound, about the effect of age upon mental powers. One is apt to select the more cheerful of their opinions in accordance with the age at which one is, or feels. The old often assume that age brings wisdom, poise, tolerance. The young, failing at times to observe in the old behaviour expressing these virtues, say that age brings cynicism, complacency, stupidity. They point out, for example, that tolerance by the old in some directions contrasts vividly with their intolerance in others.

We all agree that advancing age brings definite mental changes, but upon how much more can we agree ? Let us take one question, to which many readers would like an answer. Are people between the ages of 20 and 40 *really* at a disadvantage, in respect of their ability to learn, as compared with the under-20's ?

“Of course,” some will say. Are not school years the proper time for learning things by heart ? It is true that school children do learn things by heart, though prob-

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ably less every year. But that fact proves little, since they have no choice, and society sees to it that, when at school, few interests compete with their work. Yet again, most really important learning is not learning by rote. At this stage of our knowledge all we can say is that it would be valuable, if a widespread, systematic investigation were undertaken, to know the relative learning capacities of children, youths, and young adults, but no such inquiry has yet been made.

Until lately educational psychologists had concentrated their investigations upon the child of school age, and to a less extent upon the college and university student. Since few university students can be called adult, it may be said that adults, both young and middle-aged, have gone almost scot-free. However, a technical report upon the relation of age to human learning is given by Professor Walter R. Miles in a chapter entitled "Age and Human Society" in Professor Carl Murchison's *Handbook of Social Psychology*.¹ Before this, two important books on the subject had appeared; Professor H. L. Hollingworth's *Mental Growth and Decline*,² and *Adult Learning*,³ by Professor Edward L. Thorndike, Elsie O. Bregman, J. Warren Tilton, and Ella Woodyard of the Institute of Educational Research, Teachers' College, Columbia University.

The last-named book is especially relevant to our

¹ London: Humphrey Milford, 1935, pages 596-682.

² London: Appleton, 1928.

³ New York: Macmillan Company, 1928.

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subject, as it deals with learning between the ages of 25 and 45. In the present chapter, where some of its opinions and findings will be expounded, with comments, the term "adult learning" will be used in its broad sense, not with the narrow meaning quoted on page 15.

The difficulty of isolating all the conditions which affect adult learning may be illustrated by asking, "What kinds of adult try to learn 'subjects' or skills which can be studied quantitatively?" This reservation is an important part of the question. It is unlikely that the speech-habits, social techniques, attitudes and sentiments acquired at a "finishing school," in the diplomatic service, an army officers' mess, or a trade union office can be investigated by the ingenious experimental methods of Professor Thorndike. Yet in a closely packed society these different "polishing" techniques are very important forms of adult learning, and deserve careful study. The results might suggest that the caves which bear these gems are not so dark and unfathomed after all. Be that as it may, the human "subjects" whom, hitherto, psychologists have studied in detail, have seldom been average samples of the community. Even the fact that they were seeking education suggests their unusualness.

Thorndike reminds us that such adults may be specially ambitious, and therefore will make sacrifices in order to learn more, dull people who did not learn when young because they were dull, or foreigners and gullible folks enticed by seductive advertisements. He does not

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include those who, when young, did not learn because, though far from dull, they were "lazy." Yet when at school they may have been lazy towards a certain subject because its teacher was personally unattractive to them.¹ A vista of speculation along these lines is opened up when we imagine the educational developments of television.

It seems doubtful if nowadays much respect should be given to the hoary statement, "You can't teach an old dog new tricks." Literally interpreted, it is a platitude, for only a young dog *wants* to learn new tricks. The devices which will urge a dog to learn are few. For example, one cannot make him image future events by vivid description, or stir up his sentiments and complexes by skilful argument. In any case, the present book is not about dogs. Promise an intelligent human of 30, bored with his surroundings, that he can visit a beautiful and interesting country if he will learn the rudiments of its spoken language, or offer him a car if he will learn to drive it. Though no longer quite young, he will probably desire to learn the new tricks, and in that significant respect he differs from a dog.

While on the subject of popular beliefs we may comment upon another: that human nature never changes. This can be questioned in two ways: by pointing out the obscurity of the term "Human Nature," and by emphasizing that human *behaviour* is always being changed. The rate of variation in our environment due

¹ This theme has been developed in the author's *Fitness for Work* (London: University of London Press, 1928), pages 82-110.

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to social influences and to machinery is greater now than ever before. As a result, new incentives, ambitions, and aims continually arise. Two centuries ago few people wished to fly, even to travel far, and no young person wanted to be an electrical engineer or a film star. Nowadays not only are people's desires more varied, but many of them are created by propaganda. If we live in a town our senses are perpetually assaulted by stimuli intended to excite interest. Newspaper placards and pictorial posters incessantly provoke curiosity. As a result, many adults want to learn new techniques and skills of which their fathers, when young, would hardly have heard, and those wants are often satisfied.

Let us take examples. Last night, when I switched-on my radio set, I heard that an expert was just going to telephone from Geneva an account of current affairs ; unusually significant because of the war in Spain. Lying temptingly at hand, too, was a richly illustrated booklet about Design in Modern Life. Later I listened to—but could not quite follow—vivacious back-chat in French, which made the Paris audience laugh ; a strong incentive to learning. None of these attractions—or distractions—existed a generation ago.

For reasons like these, and because the opportunities for study have lately increased, it is profitable to inquire, "What are the chief obstacles to adult learning ?" We will present the answer in contrast with an earlier one, given, not by a dull praiser of times past, but by one of the most vivid personalities the world of psychology has

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seen, William James. In 1890 he wrote that outside of their own business the ideas gained by men before they are 25 are practically the only ideas they will have in their lives, and that they cannot get anything new. He asserted that after 25 disinterested curiosity is past, the power of assimilation gone. And he adds (amazingly if one forgets a reference elsewhere to his detestation of formal logic), "Whatever individual exceptions might be cited to these are of the sort that 'prove the rule.'" ¹

Pedantic as it may seem, one may comment that *Exceptio probat regulam*, when translated into English, misleads fewer people if it appears as "the exception tests the rule." This, as Mr. R. W. Jepson says in *Clear Thinking*,² merely means that the rule covers all cases not specifically excepted. One real exception would destroy any scientific generalization. Possibly to-day there are many more exceptions than when James wrote. But, this apart, there is no reason to believe that the age of 25 brings with it inevitable barriers to interest, and James's statement appears to be based upon pure speculation before the days of statistical inquiry. Upon the basis of this assumption, however, he expresses a further opinion :

"It would probably lead to a more earnest temper on the part of college students if they had less belief in their unlimited future intellectual potentialities, and could be brought to realize that whatever physics and political economy and philosophy

¹ *Principles of Psychology*, II. (London : Macmillan, 1901), page 402.

² London : Longmans, Green and Co., 1926, pages 26-27.

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they are now acquiring are, for better or worse, the physics and political economy and philosophy that will have to serve them to the end." ¹

One can only admire the magnificent sweep of the statement. If it is still true, the W.E.A. and the B.B.C. have a great chance.

Let us return to experiments upon adult learning. As an example of the methods used by Thorndike and his team may be cited their extensive experiments in the learning of Esperanto. Excellent reasons for choosing it as material for experiment are given on pages 44-45 of their book. If it were true that childhood is the best period for "learning a language" (this phrase implies learning to read and write it, understand it when heard, and speak it correctly) the child learners of Esperanto would have easily outstripped the adults. The results, however, point the other way, though it should be noted that exactitude of pronunciation was not tested.

The authors think it probable that in learning a language less logical than Esperanto, for example, one with many irregularities which must be mastered by sheer habituation, the adults would show less superiority over children than in the above example. But the Columbia workers are convinced that :

"The gain made in fifty, or a hundred, or five hundred hours of study of French or German or Italian or Spanish or Latin, by a group of any age from 20 to 40, will be greater than the gain made by a group aged 8 or 10 or 12, of equal native capacity."

¹ Loc. cit.

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Thorndike's book, therefore, shows that adults can acquire many important subjects easily and rapidly, and could learn much more than they do. What, then, hinders them ?

In an attempt to answer this question, testimony was secured from each of ninety-nine subjects about his or her own learning, from childhood to the day of report. Thirty-nine answerers were 40 years old or older, forty-three were from 30 to 39, and seventeen from 20 to 29 years old. They answered 163 questions relating to forty acts, habits, or accomplishments, and asking "How old were you when you learned it ?" and "If you had not learned it, could you now learn it ?"

These questions were followed by forty-three others, which related to changes in attitudes or opinions about things causing annoyance or fear, and in religious and political beliefs. It might be noted that there were no questions about changes in attitudes towards other social strata in the answerer's country (this was in 1928), though in England an important factor determining a person's attitude toward adult learning might be his speculations or knowledge about the social status of pupils in the class he proposed to join. To an English social psychologist this is an uncomfortable but important fact.

There is a bluff simplicity in the statement of the findings concerning certain athletic skills (page 111). "Learning to swim, skate, and dance may be taken as fair samples of learning in athletics. Age is evidently not an insuperable barrier ; learning to swim and dance occurring at

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all ages to 50." The question-form seems to have afforded little encouragement to refined answers. Yet, if given a chance, self-critical adults might reply that they could just keep themselves ungracefully near the surface of the water, move on the ice with staccato shuffles or Caliban-like waving of limbs, and walk more or less delicately opposite a resigned partner while music was being played in their vicinity. Could they, however, be said to swim, skate, and dance ? The question is asked in no carping spirit, since independent adults often give up trying to learn a new skill if after a "reasonable" time they fail to make what they, and not others, judge to be "reasonable" progress. Other less critical people, even after middle-age, gaily undertake to learn new skills, achieve ability at a low level, which does not worry them, and continue to disport themselves happily. So far as their leisure-time activities are concerned, they believe, with the late Mr. G. K. Chesterton, that whatever is worth doing at all is worth doing badly. We may call them extraverts or say that they do not fear making fools of themselves. We may even speculate that there will be relatively more of these people in a new country than in an old one ; but to do this hints at important problems in adult learning.

With these reservations, it may be noted that age is not an insuperable barrier to learning in athletics, though there is an enormous majority of opinion (ratio 71 to 9) that these athletic skills would be harder to learn at the late ages over 40 than at the earlier ages.

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A focal argument of the present book is that adult education, to be of use in a democratic community, ought to help the learner to clothe his thoughts in words, and to discuss more freely and successfully. The Columbia University experiments whet one's appetite for more facts about the learning of languages by adults. The answers show a slight majority of opinion that learning to read a foreign language becomes harder at the later ages, but an emphatic majority to the effect that learning to speak it is harder then. The "element" (*sic*) of muscular skill, says the book, counts "somewhat" in learning to speak, unless a person is content to pronounce barbarously and, as a consequence, fail more or less to make himself understood.

The comment already made about the learning of athletics is relevant here. Adults notoriously differ in the degree of fastidiousness with which they hear and speak a foreign language. In the early stages of learning some are even held back by the distaste with which they perceive the ugly noises they are making. The uncritical ones, the cheery waders-in, achieve quicker, if lop-sided progress.¹ Excellent work may be done in this field if investigators will bear in mind the individual differences of self-criticism which may appear in learning a foreign language or in altering the pronunciation of one's own. People taught foreign languages by older methods, and

¹ American readers may note the iron restraint which, so far, has kept out of this book any reference to *The Education of Mr. Hyman Kaplan* by Leonard Q. Ross (London: Constable, 1937).

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having established their pronunciation before radio and gramophone brought real French into their homes, may regard themselves as "speaking French like natives." They are happy, contrasted with the self-conscious modern who thinks "What's the use ? How can I ever speak like M. Stéphan ?"

This leads us to a subject spectacularly neglected by many educators, the desirability of teaching an adult pupil to speak upon a difficult subject or in trying circumstances. The Columbia list of questions contained one about speaking in public, so that reference should be included to a performance in which "sensitiveness to the reactions of others to one's personality would be conspicuous."

This, of course, is not the same as sensitiveness to the *imagined* reactions of others, a state which may deter many from speaking in public at all, and others from venturing to do so, unless the audience is known in advance to be friendly. An actress with twenty years of world-wide experience once told me that she is still reluctant to accept engagements in a certain English city (famous, by the way, for its friendly audiences) because on her very first appearance there she was booed. Lecturers sometimes feel anticipatory distaste at a particular class because the corresponding class in the preceding year was inattentive ; even the thought of the lecture-room which held such an audience may be repellent.

The Columbia investigators think it would have been wise to include in their list further questions relating to

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performances producing "shyness." They say that, at late ages, the expectation of difficulty of learning is not chiefly a matter of intellect. Rather it is due to absence of the appropriate muscular skills, and to fear of making a fool of oneself, or of adverse social comment. This matter, important enough to demand a section to itself, will be discussed on pages 52 to 53.

Of thirty-four people, aged 40 or over, who had learned to speak in public, seven thought that acquiring this skill at the later age was easier, and twenty-seven that it was harder. For those aged 30 to 39, six said it was easier at the later ages, four that the difficulty was equal, and twenty-six that learning was harder then.

Not only do we read of sensitiveness to ridicule and to adverse comment, but also to "undesired attention"; it being remarked that the difficulty might diminish if it were customary for mature and old people to learn to swim, ride bicycles, and speak German.

One of the most cogent reasons why adults learn less than they might is that at present they do not desire with sufficient intensity to learn new things, "Adult Learning is itself a partial preventive, or cure, for adult inability to learn."

An excellent account of other observations upon age and learning is given by Dr. Ll. Wynn Jones in his presidential address to the Psychology Section of the British Association for the Advancement of Science.¹

The facts of adult learning, we read in *Learn and Live*,

¹ Proceedings of the Norwich Meeting, 1935, pages 157-168.

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strongly support the views of those who give time, thought, and money to adult education. But if it is to be fully successful, the classification of learners according to their capacity should be more searching and decisive than it is for the young. Not an easy task !

CHAPTER V

WILLINGNESS AND UNWILLINGNESS TO LEARN

CHAPTER IV. gave evidence that the ability to learn declines later in life than is popularly supposed. A number of abilities are acquired when young because the mere fact of being at school means that we cannot help learning them. We are like the man of whom the English schoolboy asked, "Le père, pourquoi travaille-t-il ?" wrote "Parce qu'il a à." But what happens when, grown-up, one no longer "has to" ? Which subjects are dropped like a hot coal, and which are pursued afterwards ?

Answers to these questions might give clues to the incentives underlying different study performances. The possibility has already been mentioned that when we were very young we loved not a particular subject but its teacher, who remained stationary when we transferred our books but not our affection to another place. Whatever the causes of lack of keenness to learn when at school, more serious obstacles have arisen by the time one is emancipated from teachers. Some of these hindrances existed already during school life, but were usually less powerful then. I refer to the forces which determine

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the adult's resistance to new ideas. This simple phrase may obscure some complex forces. Without postulating a single "instinct of curiosity" we may assert that in many persons curiosity, except about neighbours, declines after youth. This may result partly from an increase in one branch of the individual's knowledge, which has caused a mental "tuning out" of others. Sometimes, clear focusing of the mind upon one subject, like Mr. Pickwick's bull's-eye lantern, makes the surrounding darkness blacker than before. While, for example, there are no branches of psychology which do not interest me, there are some which I always hope to read more about on that long wet holiday which has never yet been long enough or wet enough to allow me to get down to them !

Another cause of resistance to new ideas is the fear that admitting them might upset the tidiness, the elegance, of one's pet schemes. This may account for the reluctance of some economists, jurists, and physiologists to consider the psychological aspects of their problems. In the realm of psychology most psycho-analysts and most mental testers find it easy to remain in amicable ignorance of each other's work.

Underlying the resistance to new ideas are deeper forces. Awareness that one is regarded by others as an expert, even upon a very limited subject, increases one's self-regard. Admission that one ought to know more about neighbouring fields of knowledge would have the opposite effect.

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When our learning is no longer prescribed by others and pursued in classes with all the stimulation of group-activity, what factor determines whether a new subject will attract us enough to make us want to learn it? Probably the presence of people who symbolize the new ideas, preach or practise the activities to which they lead, and urge, attract, wheedle, or bully, until we make the new social adjustments, break the old habits, seek the society of new friends, and, consequently, see less of the old ones. A strong reason for not wanting to learn new things may be that to do so would cut us off from our friends.

After the age of 25 the choice of a subject to learn is often determined, directly or indirectly, by sex motives. The pastimes and sports most popular amongst young people to-day include many which give chances of meeting the opposite sex. The fact that the opposite sex, when encountered, may be treated with non-chalance, even insult, probably deceives few people.

In an unpublished sociological investigation of an industrial English town it was found that no satisfactory view of the community life was possible without intimate knowledge of the local dance halls, where young adults find exercise, amusement, acquaintances, and often permanent partners. In this town, where a young woman earns as much as or even more than a man of equal age, she is exceptionally free to choose a mate. Often, indeed, he is unemployed while she is earning good wages. The dance hall is a powerful rival to adult education.

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The cinema, which provides shelter, quasi-privacy, warmth, and comfortable seats, in contrast with the crowded home and the proximity of others whose ages and interests may conflict with those of the cinema goer, is another rival. This is an oft-told tale, yet in lamentations concerning the quality of cinema programmes it is seldom mentioned that the material attractions may offset the mental poverty of the fare provided.

I do not know if any one has ever studied the reasons why those people who "nearly" join an adult educational class just fail to do so. If they prefer to spend the evening in other ways, what are they? To what extent does the impulse (conscious, unconscious, or partly conscious) to obtain a mate determine the choice of spare-time activities? This is a subject so intimate that to obtain information about it might be difficult. Yet after reading accounts of Danish adult high schools, where both sexes are educated, I feel sure that the Danes could teach us much about this matter.¹

What factors cause the state of mind and body known as "not wanting to learn"? First, awareness that we lack the type of skill required. This consciousness may take two forms:

(a) A deficiency recognized, but not resented; for example, we may not try to speak French well, because we have no facility in pronouncing combinations of its vowels and consonants in the proper speech-melodies.

¹ Cf. Noëlle Davies, *Education for Life, A Danish Pioneer* (London: Williams and Norgate, 1931). An account of N. F. S. Grundtvig.

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The remedy is to acquire the skills. What holds one back from doing so? Lack of time, money, energy, and of a competent teacher? These obstacles are often real, but not always, and then we say to the pupil, "Where there's a will there's a way." But how are we to create that will? One helpful step is to decrease the will-not-to-learn. This is often due to an awareness that we lack the above-mentioned advantages, a lack which, moreover, is resented because we believe that in these respects we have not had a square deal. Some people, feeling that if their parents had encouraged them to acquire skill in dancing, swimming, and tennis, all might have been well, enjoy their martyrdom.

(b) An awareness of unjust deprivation producing the wish that others shall suffer it. A family may deeply resent the efforts of one of its members to learn a new subject, a language—especially if it be the mother tongue—or a skill. Their self-regard seems to them the natural measuring-rod for others, yet the cure for this dog-in-the-manger attitude is just that widening of education against which they have set their faces.

Another cause of reluctance to learn is absence of the mental backgrounds necessary to understand the expositions of the new subject. These backgrounds may be technical or cultural, and the distinction between them is often clear. If a motorist talks "shop" before non-motorists, awareness of ignorance may not shame them. The old-time scholar, for example, was proud that he did not possess many technical backgrounds. When the

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British Association for the Advancement of Science met at Oxford in 1832, Dr. Keble wrote to a friend, "The Oxford Doctors have truckled sadly to the spirit of the times in receiving the hodge-podge of philosophers as they did." Mr. John Langdon-Davies, in whose article in the *News Chronicle* of September 1937 this quotation appeared, continues :

"He (Dr. Keble) was particularly annoyed that certain members were given honorary degrees ; and when we find that these members included Faraday and Dalton, we realize that any schoolboy to-day is more capable of appreciating the importance of scientists than were the 'leaders of thought' a hundred years ago."

To-day, though many are defiantly unrepentant concerning their ignorance of applied science, to feel "out of it" when it is assumed that they possess a certain cultural background annoys or humiliates them. This unpleasant experience is expressed in varied ways. In England the remark, "Thank God, I'm not brainy !" or "I'm no highbrow" usually restores, even enhances, the speaker's prestige. Still, one has heard of an indoor sport invented by intellectuals who, when in the society of outdoor people, subtly steer the conversation towards the subject of books, and then note the rapidity with which the "hearties" jerk it back to its proper theme—missiles, animals, and personalities. One important cause of not wanting to learn may appear praiseworthy : the fear of "making a fool of oneself." Its deterrent effect con-

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duces to dignity, and to stodginess. It would be interesting to discover the extent to which people in other countries suffer from this inhibition. The story of the American who, asked if he could play the fiddle, replied that he didn't know because he hadn't tried, seems less funny to an Englishman who has crossed the Atlantic. And in the eyes of some English people thousands of the misguided inhabitants of the continent of Europe seem bent on making fools of themselves. This is natural, since, as is well known, foreigners have no sense of humour, except, as some one has remarked, the Austrians, who have it in a trivial kind of way.

Perhaps, however, the most important question to ask about the fear of making a fool of oneself is, "In whose eyes?" After 25, one ought not to be afraid of the ridicule of A, the dictator at school, for he is now a civil servant, and, therefore, gagged; or of B's disdain, for she married the other man. Yet the wraiths of their scorn may still paralyse us when we are tempted to do something new.

These pages were written in a small Swiss hotel. Some of the cosmopolitan guests were climbers, with scanty luggage; others were lazy lotus-eaters with large suitcases. Consequently people dressed as they liked. If I may mention these details, the choice of my own clothes at any moment depended upon temperature, the time or energy available for dressing, and personal whim. My Alpine performances varied between moderate walks up safe paths and a sleepy stroll to near-by woods. Yet at

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all times there tramped into the hotel Olympians wearing ropes and ice-axes. If their clothes, gear, or reputed exploits caused any inferiority-complex to arise in me, it must have been too feeble to notice. The reason is that no one person, or group, organizing public opinion, set any standards, except that of friendly behaviour. Also I was "abroad," and that, to an Englishman, alters everything.

Some may object that liberty is possible for an Englishman in an English hotel. I doubt, however, if his freedom would be attained so unconsciously. He might feel that he was rebelling deliberately against the silent pressure of prevailing custom ; and that, on a holiday, is tiring.

It would seem worth while to inquire of many people who used to have this fear of public opinion, real or imagined, whether they dispelled it by taking thought ; if it vanished, gradually or suddenly, and if this disappearance could be traced to the waning of some one person's influence. The relation of all this to adult learning is clear enough.

An obvious factor in unwillingness to learn is "laziness." In *Fitness for Work* I have discussed some causes of laziness : bodily sources, which may be very influential ; and factors which concern the psychologist—instincts, sentiments, complexes, and those causing "transference," introversion, and escape from reality.

"Escape from reality" is a fashionable concept, but if explanations are to be based upon it attempts should be

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made to define reality from the psychological standpoint.¹ Is the man who tends his garden in the evening, and comes into contact with mother earth, more or less in touch with reality than his neighbour who from an armchair listens to the latest news about world events ?

Professor William McDougall has emphasized the importance of the rôle of the self-regarding sentiment in the formation of character. A powerful factor which extends and deepens the self-regarding sentiment is the awareness of having a mate : a lover, a husband, or wife. Because an indisputably good reason for choosing a life partner is community of interests, any factor which decreases this community may be regarded by one partner as a serious threat to married harmony. Since to acquire a new interest is sometimes to enter a new social class, not only social but even sexual jealousy may arise. And, as Professor J. C. Flugel has shown,² these motives are complexly interwoven, even in normal people.

Another factor which militates against keenness about a subject is the "done-with" feeling. "Oh, but I *did* that at school !" How often has one heard such a remark, injured, petulant, appealing. Hearing it, you wonder if the speaker's tone would differ if he referred to "six months' hard." After all, if the modern boy has conscientiously worked through *The Shorter Boswell* and

¹ Cf. T. H. Pear, *Religion and Contemporary Psychology* (Oxford University Press, 1937).

² *Men and Their Motives* (London : Kegan Paul, 1934).

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The Best of Hazlitt—has any one yet dared to pick the "Best of Shaw"?—he may, when grown-up, feel, like a juryman, honourably excused from further service. Yet explanation is called for if subjects taught in adult classes, or heard "on the air," are regarded as interesting and exciting because they were not learnt at school. Is it the hard work in preparing for examinations, their strain, and the inexpressible joy of dispelling it by a holiday, which discolour our memories of the hapless "subject"?

Probably many of us assume, half unconsciously, that because we studied a certain subject when young it must be childish; to be put away when we became a man. Perhaps the success of the B.B.C. in arousing interests may be due in part to the novelty of the source of the information and the means of transmission, the pupil's feeling of personal intimacy with a famous teacher, the prestige of owning a radio set, and the impossibility of appearing a fool when privately acquiring the new knowledge. Whatever the reasons for success—the most probable one being that the teaching is usually excellent—the pupil gets the double exhilaration of making a new start in a new way. Providers of radio and television programmes might, therefore, be expected to rekindle ashes of enthusiasm.

In this attempt to make as complete as possible the present account of unwillingness to learn, very obvious causes have been mentioned. It is as dull to read about them as about the simple truth that objects thrown out;

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of windows fall to the ground, but the assertion is neither obvious nor true of a gas balloon. And if you scan the above list of mental obstacles, you may remember unsuccessful adult pupils who labour under still another difficulty ; though they want to learn, they “ cannot give their minds to it.” The psychological problem suggested by their failure will now be examined.

Let us suppose that the only fact we knew personally about gravity was that it “ made objects fall to the ground,” and that we subsequently remembered that filled balloons apparently defy gravity. We might then be tempted to supplement our theoretical belief. It seems impossible, too, to explain all disinclination to learn in terms of the older psychology, which identified mind with consciousness or awareness. The assumption that the kind of pupil we are thinking of could learn better if his “ mind ” were “ given ” to the “ subject ” can be supplemented by the speculation that it is actually given to something else, the nature of which the pupil may not know. So we are led to psycho-analysis.

It is hard to judge how much psycho-analytic theory should enter into an elementary treatment of a psychological subject. If no such references appear, the writer acquires, or adds to, a reputation of safeness. That he has avoided these intimate, embarrassing questions commends him to prudent people, including some students of the “ natural ” sciences who play for social safety by forgetting about those distressingly unnatural things, the human body and mind, and manifest mental

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austerity (though some have used another name for it) by studying only subjects which involve no chance of ridicule. To any one who mentions psycho-analysis the risk is considerable, for psycho-analysts' assumptions, methods of investigation, conclusions, and ways of stating them are, to put it mildly, unlike anything else known in the sciences. From this fact different thinkers have made various inferences. Two, which involve lumping all psycho-analysts together, are (a) that they are not scientists, and therefore (b) should be ignored. This may seem to us such a tidy view to take that we make our study-plans accordingly. But then we may hear of the next conclusion, that "science" at present has nothing to do with morals, culture, or wisdom, and is therefore substantially helping the civilized world to go completely insane. Yet if science be defined as organized knowledge of facts, and mental facts are hereby included, the psycho-analysts' ways of trying to find truth can be examined by the ordinary criteria of scientific reasoning. If the psycho-analyst's way is wrong, what is wrong with it? To answer this is in the philosopher's province, and a reply will not be attempted here.

A psycho-analyst's point of view concerning our own central problem of unwillingness to learn is expounded in Dr. Edward Glover's article "Psychological Obstacles to Learning," in *Adult Education*, IX., 2, 1936, pages 110-118. He begins, with enviable confidence, by asserting that if we observe the attitude of an adult of 35 towards any further learning he may undertake, we shall note

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that he is capricious in his choice of educators, criticizes his teachers, refuses to follow time-tables, and periodically excuses himself from attendance at class. There is, according to Dr. Glover, good reason to assume that the adult's drive to eliminate serves, among other purposes, that of "securing revenge for earlier thralldom and pedagogic humiliation."

While few teachers would, I think, quarrel with the picture here drawn of a certain type of adult, how far, we may ask, does this description of an adult's attitude towards further learning (leaving alone, for the moment, the hints at unconscious motives) tally with the ordinary person's observation? To what extent may a psychoanalyst's private view of the world be expressed, in part unconsciously, by publishing a literary record of his patients' weak points? (Their strong points, like happy married lives, might be dull to read about.) How far is this private view coloured by the analyst's nationality? Would a young Russian, a young American, even some young Englishmen, regard all their education as thralldom accompanied by humiliation? Allowing, however, for the fact that a psycho-therapist's "world-view," even if he has tried to free it from local influences, must be coloured by his bringing up,¹ we can be sure that the attitude of ordinary adults towards further learning is often coloured by perversity, sulkiness and introversion, which "surface" psychology cannot explain. More-

¹ One has only to compare the writings of Freud, Jung, Adler, McDougall, Watson, and A. S. Neill to see this clearly.

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over, if, when displaying these attitudes, we are questioned about their origin, we may become stirred in a way and to an extent which surprises us. This fact suggests that we are far from fully acquainted with the mechanisms underlying our emotion, and that analysis would bring interesting factors to light.

Here follows an attempted summary of Dr. Glover's argument. The middle-aged (the date of beginning mental middle-age is not stated : shall we say 25 ?) are not entirely refractory to educative processes, provided that the deeper mechanisms guiding individual interest are allowed to function spontaneously. Yet in those who show this plasticity their instinct-life is functioning with comparative smoothness ; they may, for example, be happily married. In middle-age, too, society does not actively interfere with the individual's chief instinctive drives unless they infringe the code of civil law, yet, up to 25, Dr. Glover believes, the moral compulsion of education has been exercised at every conceivable point. This retards rather than accelerates the true educative process. In other words, much of the education given before 25 consists in preventing the young from *doing* things. The difficulties caused by this, beginning in the nursery, continue through adolescence and early adult life.

The child is also unconsciously struggling with the same impulses as those against which society has set her ban, and thus, in order to secure control, a number of primitive unconscious mechanisms are put into action.

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But the reasons for doing this contain an element of irrationality which matches the irrationality of the adult. The child has an excessive anxiety, and in the struggle to master it may interfere with its own mental life to such an extent that it damages its capacity for learning.

“ It may use, for example, the mechanism of repression which abolishes all derivatives of unconsciously forbidden impulse. This is quite a normal procedure, but in its zeal the child's mind goes to excess and thereby injures its own mental receptivity and retentiveness of memory. It learns to forget all it has learnt, and refuses to learn more.”

There is a fine sweep about the word “ all ” in the last sentence. But many people certainly have felt towards certain “ subjects ” a guilt which seemed mysteriously excessive. How many childish tears shed over mathematics expressed regret that this subject was not being mastered ; how many arose from baffled resentment because the pupil did not know what he was expected to do, and how many from the child's awareness that, having given up hope of being any good at mathematics, he has day-dreamed regularly during the lessons and lost touch with the subject : Here the psycho-analyst postulates far-reaching results of an extensive absorption of mental energy and interest in unconscious phantasy. Examples, says Dr. Glover, abound where the “ lack of concentration ” complained of can be traced to struggles with the massive drives of adolescent sexuality.

In this instance, as he remarks, the cause is patent.

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However, he makes further suggestions which, if true of all minds, explain many difficulties of adult adaptation to society. It is hard, however, to put them simply without distortion.

“ Where the instincts (with which the young adult struggles . . .) are infantile in origin, the cause of lack of concentration is not patent, and it may continue throughout life, and only occasionally be diminished by a chance smoothness in function of adult instinct. From the earliest stages, thinking is in part a pleasure-process, but as the child develops this effort is harnessed more and more in the service of reality-adaptation. As we are accustomed to say, pleasure-thinking has gradually become reality-thinking.”

Here, presumably, the “ we ” refers to the psychoanalysts, for the usefulness of Freud’s “ reality-principle ” as a means of explanation has been questioned.¹ It seems, too, far from “ easy to see what has happened to the thinking-apparatus of the adolescent,” for psychologists (including both psychoanalysts and behaviourists) have neglected the many unsolved questions about this thinking-apparatus.²

Dr. Glover assumes that (1) if reality-thinking reverts to pleasure-thinking it becomes sexualized ; (2) it then becomes subject to the “ laws ” of guilt-reaction ; (3) an immediate consequence of this is increased inhibition

¹ E.g. by W. McDougall, *Psycho-analysis and Social Psychology* (London, 1936).

² Cf. J. C. Flugel, *A Hundred Years of Psychology* (London : Duckworth, 1935), page 240.

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of all thought. He supposes, therefore, that all pleasure-thinking (presumably between certain ages) is sexual thinking. Without supporting or challenging this statement, especially in the naked form which it assumes above (perhaps starker than Dr. Glover might wish it), we may agree that a great deal of day-dreaming is concerned with sex. And this suggests an explanation of certain kinds of emotional or affective "stupidity." Any one who would dismiss it outright should study the contents and titles of the pictorial posters outside a hundred cinemas, talk with the staff of subscription lending libraries, especially the cheap ones, note the words of "crooners," the illustrations and phraseology of magazine advertising, the technique of radio-advertisement, and the contents of popular newspapers. The interesting question here is not the insoluble one : how much pleasure-thinking is non-sexual? but whether, after a time, some adults' "thinking" becomes almost equivalent to furtive day-dreaming about sexually-toned matters, and if so whether there results a tendency to be ashamed of, or shy about, all thinking, as distinct from action.

Connected with this, perhaps, is the state known as "negativism" (not confined to children or to those with serious mental disturbance), in which the person "sabotages" all, or nearly all, his own learning. He may not refuse to subject himself to educative processes ; he may be pathetically anxious to learn ; yet his unconscious negativism makes it impossible for him to do so.

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Is there any cure for such a condition ? If the individual's internal difficulties cannot be altered directly—to do this would require some form of psycho-therapy—the influences bearing upon him may be modified. The social and economic forces partly responsible for his difficulties may sometimes be changed in direction or intensity. The curriculum and technique of teaching may be varied. But the greatest influence would be exerted by a teacher whose relationship with the pupil was directed by an intimate knowledge of adult shyness, laziness, and stupidity.

CHAPTER VI

ACQUIRING "BACKGROUND"

CHAPTER I. suggested the psychological significance of the fact that learning after 25 often enriches culture. One of its characteristics is an increase in discrimination between things and people, and in the gradation of responses to them. "Response" may include not only overt behaviour but abstention from such behaviour, as in the expression of tolerance by civilized people. What then, psychologically described, is culture ?

In *Culture and Environment*,¹ by F. R. Leavis and Denys Thompson, culture is regarded as critical awareness. They indicate ways in which it may be trained. They insist upon the necessity of increasing purely literary education, for without it we cannot "maintain continuity with the world of taste and sensibility." Yet, they maintain, literary education is only a substitute for vital contact with the culture which literature describes. That culture was a way of living, expressed by folk-songs, folk-dances, Cotswold cottages, and handicraft products, "involving social arts, codes of intercourse, and a responsive adjustment growing out of immemorial ex-

¹ London : Chatto and Windus, 1933.

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perience to the natural environment and the rhythm of the year."

The central position of these writers is illustrated by their attitude towards the way of living which characterized the American *Middletown*.¹ To read about it, they think, will convince doubters that the English folk once had a culture ; now so nearly forgotten that the educated often find it hard to grasp what the assertion means.

The dissolution or liquidation of culture in *Middletown* is blamed upon the machine, and this old accusation will not be repeated here. Arthur Pound, Stuart Chase, Sinclair Lewis, Floyd Dell, and others have described the effects of the machine upon American society, yet machine-towns exist in England ; a fact sometimes forgotten.

Education for culture would cause one to be more discriminative towards perceptual experiences from the present environment. Examples which illustrate this statement may occasionally seem difficult to reconcile with a belief that culture has advanced. To cite the increased popularity of Bach, Brahms, and Beethoven to-day as compared with thirty years ago is to court the objection that jazz and crooners seem to be even more to the public taste. All the same, there is syncopated music and syncopated music. If the light, space, and airiness of the modern living-room be compared with their absence from the Victorian drawing-room, it may

¹ R. S. and H. M. Lynd, *Middletown* (New York : Harcourt Brace, 1929).

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provoke an onslaught upon steel-tubing chairs and glass tables. To-day there is a higher general level of culture with regard to the shape, colour, and cleanliness of clothing compared with that of thirty years ago, and this advance is due to the machine. It is not so easy to come to a simple comparative judgment about foods. In a town nowadays a greater variety of foods can be bought, yet they may not taste very differently.

We are more vividly aware than ever before of the dimensions and divisions of the world we live in, though whether this tends, on the whole, to increase our tolerance of other peoples is hotly debated. There seems to be much individual kindness but much collective harshness.

Awareness of one's intellectual world is keener. It is said that in America and England the public desire for facts has recently increased ; the conventional newspaper, in which opinions are usually presented together with the facts, is being supplemented by "news without views," as in the American *Time*. The B.B.C. news-bulletins are similarly constructed.

What can be said in the present chapter about the increased knowledge of applied physics and chemistry, noticeable in most countries ? Much of it is useful and desirable, but the world would be happier and certainly safer without many of its developments. The aeroplane and the motor car are idols before which we are all compelled to bow. Those who make them, and those less well-known people who control their food-supply

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of oil, are our real rulers. Information about the cultural benefits these inventions have recently bestowed upon mankind may be obtained from the Abyssinians, civilized by Italy, and the Chinese witnesses of Japan's bombing. Passing to less spectacular uses of machines, one may ask if an "applied scientist's" specialized training, which seldom includes any biological instruction, is really cultural.

A factor to be remembered in the attempt to account for the lack of culture in a young person who has left school only a few years, is the effect of early subdivision of study. The responsibility for this rests upon the universities, in so far as they control the examinations for which school teachers must prepare pupils.

Mass production inevitably requires standardization, some degree of which no reasonable person would deplore. Yet when very large quantities of goods are made all alike their users' tastes may have to follow suit, for, since goods are not made unless the public want them, it is often necessary, by means of advertising and propaganda, to standardize the public.

The policy of the modern Press tends to iron out differences of opinion. Even the *Morning Post* could not attract enough readers to save it from this treatment. A popular newspaper may have leading articles of only a few lines, which yet appear to give the facts and the appropriate opinion to be formed from them. After a few doses of this attractive mixture, the reader may be relieved of any desire to criticize. Another sign of

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literary levelling-down is that nowadays to call a book "readable" is to praise it highly, though we might hesitate to inform a host that his wine and food were drinkable and eatable.

Leavis and Thompson remind us that in old-time manual work a craftsman, *e.g.* the village wheelwright, had to possess much subtle knowledge and fine perception concerning his material ; an acquisition which to-day is often unnecessary. Perhaps the authors do not sufficiently respect the fact that some present-day new trades demand similar subtleties ; but they are on sure ground when they state that as other vehicles of tradition are dissolved we are forced more and more to rely upon language. And by that is meant not only the ability to write words, or to recite them beautifully, but to use them in conversing, even in differing, with other people.

CHAPTER VII

THE CONVERSATION AND ITS DELIGHTS

ONE of the many pleasant features of my job is that I often hear satisfying conversations between people of very different types. I have always valued this privilege, but when a London publisher told me that he envied psychologists because of it, my appreciation grew. And then a man I know—he was on the staff of a university—got rather a shock. He had apologized to his hostess for not knowing how to play bridge. Tight-lipped, baring her iron-stained soul, she replied, "If you had to entertain my husband's friends, you'd learn bridge in a week." Since hearing about this, I have been grateful indeed.

Now, if even editors and hostesses long to hear interesting conversations, there may be others; people in dull villages, people who, once gregarious, are now lonely, people who aren't as young as they were, people who loathe the boring talk on the 8.15 up to town, and people who are hard up. They might like to have been present at a few conversations which I have been lucky enough to hear.

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Over a summer afternoon coffee on the Kobenzl, looking down on Vienna, a Continental *littérateur* contrasted his opinions of what he (not I) termed the "Oxford way" of broaching a new subject, and of northern English forthrightness. Resisting any temptation to impersonate the types he knew so well, and contenting himself with "indirect oration," he made some thought-provoking points. It was, perhaps, not so much a conversation as a soliloquy with monosyllabic encouragements.

In a New York club I met a very friendly middle-Westerner. He got up from the piano to talk world-politics, and expounded the outlook of his family, who regarded England as very far away and a little dim. I have never seen or heard such goings-on in a London club. In a Copenhagen hotel a Dane, an American, an Austrian, and an Englishman compared, in English, the social problems which radio has made in their respective countries. And in England, over the port, a revered newspaper editor and world-famed war correspondent, both in the seventies, exchanged impressions of unpopular celebrities they had known. Beginning in London, they switched over to Ireland, then to India. We learned something about the quarries from which those apparently calm editorials had been hewn, and, better still, about some stones which had reluctantly been rejected. I once belonged to a social circle at which, each evening, a different specialist recited his scientific creed, and was then cheerily but ruthlessly cross-examined. I remember

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an engineer speculating how life may have developed from inanimate matter. In retrospect, his hypotheses seemed to owe a little to Messrs. Heath Robinson and Harry Tate. But the subsequent talk was grand.

All these treats, mind you, were conversations ; not lectures, talks, debates, discussions, interviews, or even variety. Just friendly conversations, with that unique flavour of civilization which the other ways of exchanging ideas so often lack. Now, with the utmost appreciation of the B.B.C.'s efforts I venture to suggest that we might be given more radio-conversations.

Comparisons are not always odious, and I am going to make one. One evening I heard two men discuss on the radio a subject which doesn't matter for the moment. It happened to be one about which I know something, through both books and friendships. From the speakers I heard with pleasure several new facts. After I had switched-off, I found myself thinking, not for the first time, that a great charm of radio is the way in which it excuses you from visiting uncomfortable halls and hot theatres, and brings speakers to your fireside. Now, it is just people like those two who come to my fireside. Do they talk like that ? They wouldn't dream of it. They converse.

These speakers were intelligible and interesting, but their so-called discussion consisted in reading, hurriedly and nervously, two closely packed essays. When, later, these men really discussed, they sounded as if they were hot, rattled, snarling. In such discussions manner, and

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manners, are too ruthlessly subordinated to matter. The nutritive, even the medicinal values of talk are never neglected by the B.B.C. ; could not the chef's touch appear a little oftener ?

There are, of course, difficulties. Our country is not swarming with people who are at one and the same time full of unpublished facts and burning to pass them on—easy speakers, easy mixers, and willing to rehearse. Many scholars, for example, are touchy, under their cloak of shyness or extreme politeness, and the combined charm of the whole Broadcasting House staff might fail to coax some academic leopards into changing the least of their spots. But need all radio conversations be either completely fatuous or by solemn people about serious things ? Will there never be a Schnitzler, Shaw, or Coward to write for the radio, especially for television ? Must we cease to hope for light-handed Pachmanns, Kreislers, or Yvette Guilberts in the speech world ?

But, it may be asked, have I considered the expense of hunting for talent, and the labour of cross-correspondence ? Well, to assemble and rehearse three or four people is harder than to get one or two, but it is often worth the trouble. The job of getting the members of a large orchestra together, and rehearsing them, is tackled cheerfully. Bringing good conversers to the microphone may be difficult, tedious, and expensive. There would be "flops," of course. But we listen sympathetically to occasional flat turns in variety, and I feel sure that as much understanding would be extended to those who

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stage conversations if they were to take just a few more risks.

There are still unexhausted possibilities for radio in that stylized conversation, the interview. One "informal-formal" technique of interviewing described to me by a scientist from another country has not yet, I think, been tried in our own. I will describe it as he did. He said that he was old, learned, and that though his voice and his way of exposition were dry and uninteresting, his subject was not. Accordingly, when a radio-interview was planned, the broadcasting company first sent him some one whose voice was young, enthusiastic, and contrasted with his own in every possible way. In this rehearsal, he spoke freely upon the subject about which he wished to be interviewed, laying stress upon the points which he particularly desired should "get over." Then the interviewer and the talks writer prepared both the questions and the answers. In this way, the artistic value of the interview was maintained while the facts were given accurately and in perspective.

The popularity of old-fashioned, set debates, heard either naturally or on the radio, seems to be waning. Radio-discussions, on the other hand, appear to increase in number.

Recently, for example, the microphone picked up Mr. A. G. Street and Mr. Reginald Arkell already chatting about life in the country. Mr. Street, as most readers know, is a country dweller; Mr. Arkell, who "hares for the Paddington train every Friday night," week-ends

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in Wiltshire. The subject therefore offered chances for verbal fencing, all-in wrestling and general pyrotechnics, but the speakers were too expert to take them. Instead, they discussed the pros and cons of living in old country cottages and new council houses, the contrast and occasional clash between the week-enders' habits and those of the villagers, the drift of young country dwellers to the cities, the Londoner's impersonality, and the fact that in a village it is easy to be "somebody." These subjects were not new, but they were treated with a welcome mellowness, and in very pleasant English. Enjoyment of the discussion was perhaps chiefly æsthetic ; a pleasure rarely vouchsafed by the B.B.C. And if the solemn brigade should object that the matter was too light, it may be answered that tens of thousands of people's lives are far too solemn anyhow, and it will educate them to hear such discussers as Mr. Street and Mr. Arkell.

The B.B.C. kindly gave me some notes upon the experience gained during their series "Men Talking," held from January to April 1937. This series is being continued at the moment of writing. I have used these notes very freely in the next pages.

The subjects discussed were :

- Coronation decorations.
- The inheritance of wealth.
- The emphasis on sport in the Press.
- The Continental Sunday.
- Permanence in building.
- Should there be an aristocracy ?
- Manners.

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Bringing up children.

The English.

Women.

Working for money and working for the public.

Are games silly ?

University representation in Parliament.

The method has been to use two studios, to start the speakers talking in one studio from two to five minutes in advance of the advertised time of the programme, to make the announcement from another studio, and to fade the speakers "in" and "out" slowly, with a closing announcement from the other studio.

"Fading in" and "fading out" were used to avoid heavy beginnings and pompous endings. The speakers sat in easy-chairs, with a "ribbon microphone" on a table between them. Speakers who like to smoke were allowed to do so. At first the participants discussed the subjects beforehand, to ensure that they differed adequately, and to agree concerning the points which ought not to be forgotten in the subsequent broadcast discussion. But this was a failure. Speakers tried to do again what they had done before ; they strove to reproduce bright remarks, and vivacity suffered. Later in the series, where the participants were strangers, they met at lunch before the afternoon broadcast and talked of anything except their subject. This gave them a sense of each other's "style" and background, without allowing them to prepare the speeches.

Though in this experiment the broadcasts with two

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speakers provided better conversation than those with three, since with the latter number conversationalists tended to wait for each other, there is room for further trials with three voices. An element of surprise is added when the listener does not know which of the other two will answer a point.

Though it may be a personal preference, I feel that a third speaker is valuable to give perspective, of space or time, or both. For example, in a future discussion involving some aspect of that ever-interesting question "Standard English versus Dialect," why not have an American to comment when the issues raised are similar, non-existent, or apparently unworthy of notice in his country, where geographical and social differentiations of speech are less important? A discussion between two women might be compered by a man, or a woman might perform the same function when two men are speaking.

The B.B.C. reports that at first speakers feared that conversation might "dry up," and, since both were anxious to "keep the thing going," there was much overlapping and "shouting down." These features are natural in any conversation, and should not be regarded as defects if they do make its understanding difficult. However—and this could not have been foretold from theory—there proved to be no real risk of "drying up." As a consequence, the tempo in such conversations became slower and more satisfactory.

It would appear to be a mistake to use speakers who are too epigrammatic. It is said that the conversation which

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is too brilliant becomes tiresome to hear, because the speakers develop a tendency to contrast with each other, which soon leads them into barren patches.

The B.B.C.'s discomfort at the thought of harbouring an epigram-maker is comprehensible, but it is to be hoped that it will not induce a bleak distrust of any sentence in a discussion which is not solemn, or the reflection that the light touch is adequately looked after—heaven be praised!—by ribald people in the Entertainments Department. One is often helped to understand a talk on an important subject by humour which, usually good-tempered, though sometimes slightly malicious, puts the situation into some sort of perspective. Since humour may differ in different districts, it will be a thousand pities if the broadcasting authorities neglect it.

Other recent contributions of British broadcasting to the cultural background of listeners may be noted briefly. An imaginary town has been invented, and happenings in it are broadcast. The first concerned town-planning, and illustrated the course of the town-planning scheme from its birth to the final resolution of the Council. This was done in dramatic "shots" from committee rooms, streets, public houses, and the Council chamber. Further scenes in the town's life will be broadcast. The underlying idea is that this town should be the medium for explanations "in the flesh" of many subjects of public interest.

A series of twelve weekly talks described exceptional public services rendered under statutory powers, to

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illustrate valuable benefits which the public, and poor people in particular, can secure through their local authorities.

Another series, "Work in Progress," illustrates the application of scientific invention. Two voices were used : one of the scientists, the other of a person who applies the scientist's discovery. A successor to this series, "Men and Machines," illustrates the reactions of men to the machines they use : *e.g.* coal-face machinery which displaces the hand-hewer. In other talks, a medical psychologist discusses the maladjustments of "awkward" children, and in "It Might Happen to You" there are two speakers in each talk. The first describes a personal misadventure, the second comments informally upon what might or ought to have been done.

CHAPTER VIII

DIFFERING WITH OTHERS

IN most books about clear thinking, public speaking, debate, and discussion there is little appreciation of the psychological complexities which often arise when civilized people express differences of opinion in speech and, moreover, go on expressing them. Other things being equal, educated persons can do this better than others, but though this fact suggests problems in social psychology, they have not been formulated. Some may doubt if they are worth discussing. Honest people, they say, can differ with each other over long periods, can respect each other's opinions and remain good friends. This, however, is probably true only of certain unusual individuals. More frequently, when people who hold strongly opposed views live together without quarrelling, it is because they have agreed to differ. If so, perhaps they are not always quite such good friends as they seem. One is sometimes told of English members of Parliament (seldom named) who, after attacking each other violently in the House, are great friends immediately afterwards. It is not easy to decide how often this actually occurs, and whether the fact is proffered as evidence of virtue or

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cynicism. But many ordinary people early in life renounce the pleasure of speaking their minds, mentally equate argument with quarrelling, and eventually come to believe that silence is golden. Probably, when they used to try to express opinions, what silenced them was not so much active opposition—for to meet that may be stimulating—but perception of their friends' annoyance, which led to the belief that, except with unusual opponents, argument "gets you nowhere." This may lead to shyness, a word which obscures several different conditions, especially as the line between shyness and sulks is often vague.

One cause of this kind of "shyness" may be the tendency of grown-ups to say to a child, "Don't argue!" and, heaven knows, add the elders, there's often good reason for saying it! Perhaps, however, if even at that early age a definite line had been drawn between argument and mere obstructionism, and explained to the child, it would have helped him in the future.

This discussion of discussion may be opened by the remark that an opinion which we wish to oppose orally has usually been expressed orally. Perception of the words, the speech-melody, the speaker's facial expression, gestures, posture, clothes, even his belongings, may all determine the hearer's attitude.

Possibly different hearers are impressed by different factors in the complex behaviour-pattern described above, and this may account for many mutual misunderstandings during discussion. Probably few of us, unless we are

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teachers, argue actively with those who know far less or far more than we ; with those for whom we feel no affection, or a great deal ; with those who are very young or very old. If there are objectors to these statements, the vehemence of their protests might indicate extravert tendencies, of which a desire to "butt in" is certainly one.

Let us consider some factors which determine the perception of a spoken statement. Its dictionary meaning is not always the one which is understood. Illogical rubbish, if impressively intoned, is believed by many hearers, as radio advertisers and a few politicians know well. For this reason, if one does not wish to fall an easy prey to the spell-binder, it is helpful, when listening to speakers who appear and sound unusually impressive, to follow Thomas Carlyle's advice, and not only to "look fixedly upon a man's clothes till they become transparent," but to "hear through" the spoken words to the mind which is choosing them. This requires some natural inclination and some training, but the results are worth the trouble. They may prevent us, for example, from assuming that a speaker who sounds pompous must be expressing an inward superiority or complacency, for he may be over-compensating for feelings of inferiority.

In a longer book than this it would be interesting to describe those subtle variations of accent, intonation, and speech-melody which must be assessed in any attempt to answer the question, "Are certain people's voices and

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general way of speaking really aggressive, provocative, grumbling, whining, conciliatory, or charming," *i.e.* do they express any semi-permanent trait of character? Acquaintance with professional users of the microphone may lead to scepticism, but it is true to say that a voice which to some sounds manly and independent may be complained of by others as aggressive and unnecessarily truculent; preciseness in some Scottish speech sounds like preciosity in England, while the unusually "level" tones of some American women impress one European as signs of social poise and another as marks of emotional poverty.

It seems certain that when discussing controversial matters subjective interpretation of speech is inevitable. The books, therefore, which advise us what to say in discussion ought to be supplemented by others telling us how to say it. I believe, for example, that such differences of manner between Northerners and Southerners in England and between English, Americans, and Australians, are very striking to many hearers, and unless consciously allowed for, can raise unnecessary barriers between potential friends.

This line of thought, however, may lead into a swamp of misunderstanding. In it one will meet those people who always say what they think, but get angry if you do; others who preach that every one should be natural—as if this could be, since language is acquired by imitation!—and still others who close all discussion with, "People talk too much already; why teach them, at the public

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expense, to talk more ? ” To such objectors—often themselves good talkers—we merely reply that the technique of differing with others in such a way as to retain their friendship and not to destroy all desire for further discussion is well worth studying. The following are interesting subjects to investigate :

First, the interruption. At some point the listener “chimes in.” When ? How ? In what tone of voice, and with what form of words ? Are they consciously modified to suit both the occasion and the person interrupted ? What kind of introduction warns the speaker to stop ? One type of interruptor deliberately selects a phrase which inserts his opinion like a chisel splitting a plank ; another sandbags the speaker with a blunt ejaculation ; a third, like a teacher of motor-driving, gently takes over the controls, bringing the speaker’s argument to a stop, or quietly steers it to the right or left. Related questions suggest themselves ; for example, in what respects is the technique of interruption identical or similar in different modern languages, or in different geographical or social dialects of the same language ? A rich harvest may reward any team of phoneticians, philologists, and social psychologists who would undertake such an investigation. Let us illustrate. In some social groups there is the convention that when any one breaks in upon a speaker, to differ with him, the form of interruption should mention the other one’s name or title, if the speakers’ relationship is distant, and use a term of familiarity, endearment, or affectionate insult if it is

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intimate. After this there often follows a gentle phrase, the choice of which may even characterize the interrupter's social group. "I wonder if I might? . . ." "Don't you think it's just possible to look at that in another way? . . ." "I shouldn't dream of contradicting you—but I used to live with these people. . . ." "Aren't you forgetting that their point of view may be caused by the way they have suffered lately? . . ." "Of course, tastes differ, but I shouldn't feel honest if I didn't say . . ." etc. Some readers may think that all these phrases are insincere, and that "I don't agree" is enough; that if you think the other man a fool or a liar you ought not to suffer him gladly. Yet "he who says what he likes, will soon hear something he doesn't," is not a bad motto of social life. Indeed, people whose job requires them to be unusually polite, in circumstances where incivility would lead to failure or even dismissal, learn many pleasant and not always insincere phrases, and, like a tennis player, choose their strokes for the occasion. Perhaps some of these diplomatists, when they approach retiring age, might be persuaded to reveal their secrets. The classical treatises on good manners are not up-to-date enough, for conversation is a social pattern notoriously subject to the vagaries of fashion.

Finishing a discussion is one form of interruption. Sometimes it is harder to cease than to continue. It is easy to say, "Let's agree to differ," yet a wounded tone may contradict the words used. It is, too, often difficult to win a debate or discussion gracefully and to keep the

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triumphant "I told you so" tone and look out of one's final behaviour.

How can we know when our way of differing with a person is irritating him? In some circumstances nobody could doubt it; in others, subtle changes in facial colour, trembling of the hand or lip, restlessness, or alteration of posture, with or without a changed tone of voice, tell a sensitive percipient that all is not well. Much of his interpretative success, however, is usually due to the fact that the person observed is of his own social class, his own sex, comes from the same country or the same district. The importance of this may be illustrated by the reminder that two great counties in the North of England are both famous for straightforward ways of speaking. Yet if it be mentioned that many outsiders "hear" truculence in the speech of one, but not in the other, readers may have little difficulty in identifying the county referred to.

It seems probable that the inscrutability which we ascribe to members of some other nations is partly due to our failure to interpret changes in their voices and bodily expression. The easy manners which sometimes characterize educated people who have travelled widely may owe much to their greater facility in discriminating, interpreting, and reacting appropriately to the outward and visible signs of personality in "foreigners." Tutors at the ancient English universities help their pupils to express opinions politely and to differ with others amicably. Whatever the relative merits of the older and younger English universities, graduates who have been

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taught by tutors are more diplomatic in their ways of differing with others, because of the better (and, alas ! more expensive) methods used to encourage expression of opinion. The employment of this system by the W.E.A. has been successful. Most W.E.A. tutors, however, will know of students who never "have the nerve" to speak in class, even when invited. Often they cannot shake off the habits of thirty or more years.

CHAPTER IX

WHY NOT LEARN TO DISCUSS ?

MOST of us will agree that to expound, explain, suggest, persuade, converse, discuss, argue, debate, bicker, and quarrel are different activities, even if they have overlapping factors. I wish now to urge, with reasons, that the technique of discussion can be learnt, and will begin by illustrating from an actual example the many interesting and important psychological issues which arise when one considers discussion as a pattern of social behaviour.

An unanswered letter lies on my desk. It may remain there for days, for reasons which are cogent to me but not to its writer, "A." "A" has simply asked me to "see," *i.e.* to converse with, "B," a person in authority, to obtain his interest and active co-operation in a certain scheme. To "A," the desirability of the project seems axiomatic ; to me, a fairly sound postulate. Why, then, is the letter unanswered ? Through my feeble will ? I doubt it. "B" is a friend, accessible, sympathetic, courteous, patient—and I shall not go to see him yet. I shall write to "A" that it is difficult to explain in a letter why I am delaying, and that it would be easier to

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put all this in conversation. In short, while I wish to converse with the inaccessible "A," I postpone entering into this relationship with the accessible "B." Why? Because the conversation with "B," if unsuccessful, would be very difficult to re-open, therefore I want to anticipate doubts, hesitations, difficulties which may arise in "B's" mind as I unfold my scheme. I must plan in order that most of them do not arise. Since everything may depend upon "B's" reception of my first proposals, I must prepare them, imagining many "if's" and "but's."

Let us regard this situation from the psychologist's standpoint. It is characteristically human, *e.g.* the dog's preliminary sniffings, the suspicious exploratory remarks of human strangers when they meet, have no counterpart in this example. "B" will recognize me at once; he will suspect nothing from the fact that I have made an appointment with him, for he makes twenty appointments in a day. He is an expert interviewer and discussor; that is why he must be treated with such respect.

Perhaps this introduction will make clear how complex and significant these matters are. Now, it is permissible to wonder how many of the things an adult learned in the ordinary way at school will make him good at conversation and discussion. Neither of these important subjects seems to have received the attention it deserves from students of psychology. In text-books expounding the study of human conduct, there is little

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about the subtle behaviour called conversation or discussion. To this statement there are two exceptions : some books about psychotherapy ¹ and books about the interview.² There are very few about the discussion.

The interest and psychological significance of conversation have been appreciated by few modern educational psychologists, though there are exceptions. David and Rosa Katz in their *Conversations With Children* ³ give detailed accounts of conversations with their two boys. They point out that many written records, by adults, of conversations which children have held, either with each other or with grown-ups, are documents of *individual* childish thinking, feeling, and willing. In them the point of view of the social psychologist is usually subordinate. The particular service of Jean Piaget was to make a programme of investigation into the increased socialization of thinking, as childish speech becomes more mature.⁴ In England the work of Susan S. Isaacs ⁵ has been based in part upon conversations with children. She has criticized certain aspects of Piaget's methods and conclusions.

¹ Cf. D. Forsyth, *The Technique of Psycho-analysis* (London : Kegan Paul, 1932), and J. Glover, *The Technique of Psycho-analysis* (London, 1928).

² Cf. W. V. Bingham and B. V. Moore, *How to Interview* (New York : Harpers, 2nd edition).

³ London : Kegan Paul, 1936.

⁴ J. Piaget : *Language and Thought in the Child*, and *Judgment and Reasoning in the Child* (London : Kegan Paul).

⁵ S. S. Isaacs : *Intellectual Growth in Young Children*, 1930, and *Social Development of Young Children* (London : Kegan Paul, 1933).

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It is hard to find many references by psychologists to *discussions*, especially between more than two persons, in which there has been a genuine desire to achieve a pooling of knowledge and an agreement upon some course of action. Yet such discussion is a very complicated social pattern of human behaviour. An attempt to state some of the psychological problems which it suggests has been made by Ruth H. Manson and the present writer.¹ The ground of that paper will not be covered now, though in it many psychological issues are focused more sharply than will be possible here. At the moment of writing, some would say that the world's peace depends upon the state of mind of two relatively uneducated and certainly untravelled individuals. We shall not reflect upon the psychological implications of this fact. Not entirely unconnected with it, however, is the interest taken in the campaign for education in democratic citizenship. In England, few have stimulated enthusiasm for this subject so much as Sir Ernest D. Simon and Mrs. Eva M. Hubback.² They quote many examples of the lamentable narrowness and ignorance of general culture which the university specialist too often displays if he tried to write, speak, or act in public life. The scientific simpleton and the literate loafer are both unhelpful in the task of government. Any one who reads Dr. R. H.

¹ "The Conversation as a Basis for Judgments of Personality." *Character and Personality*, III. 1935, pages 222-229.

² *Education for Citizenship*. (Published by Morley College, Westminster Bridge Road, London, S.E.)

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Thouless's *Straight and Crooked Thinking*,¹ Professor G. C. Field's *Prejudice and Impartiality*,² and Mr. R. W. Jepson's *Clear Thinking*³ will see that the kinds of thinking required in local and national government require special training.

What abilities will a citizen need if he is to be of use ? He should vote intelligently, making a judgment with a useful background of knowledge. He will hope to take some part in local public life. The school will have taught him to read, frequently with discretion. It will often have taught him to speak, but this word is ambiguous. If he can recite audibly and pleasantly in the school play, this is no mean performance, though it does not guarantee that he will be able to propose a simple vote of thanks with any grace. He may have spoken effectively in the school debating society, but the stylized methods of such meetings cannot be transferred to social groups where give-and-take are required. Few of us would like to work on a dull committee with a brilliant member of a debating society unless he had been given special compensatory training.

Whether training for citizenship be given or not, more attention ought to be paid to the fact that at present there is little or no training for the serious, friendly, constructive discussion necessary in adult civilized life.⁴ To-day

¹ London : Hodder and Stoughton.

² London : Methuen.

³ London : Longmans, Green & Co.

⁴ This has been discussed more fully in Chapters VIII. IX. and XI. of *The Psychology of Effective Speaking* (London : Kegan Paul, 1933).

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speech-training produces good reciters, actors, radio announcers, and orators. Many speech-trainers give valuable help to pupils who may wish to discuss matters of importance with their social equals, or with hearers so distant socially from themselves that they can be addressed as if they were foreigners. Yet initiating and sustaining discussion in a mixed assembly is much harder to teach. While many teachers can demonstrate how to present debatable matter in set speeches, can impart to the pupil a technique of "straight" speaking, and certain ideas about the best ways to present his material, how many train him in the art of amicable discussion with all and sundry ?

It is possible to liken uninterrupted speaking in public to figure-skating, and the speaking required for discussion to ice-hockey. The parallel breaks down if pressed far. In everyday life, genuine discussions are seldom gladiatorial combats before gaping spectators. For this reason, and others, doubts arise concerning the utility of debates. Much harder to learn than debating is the technique necessary to justify oneself in a sustained difference of opinion with a friend, especially if one has a strong case, but likes the other chap. In comparison with this, using one's speech-mechanism as a rapier or a club is easy. Another difficult task is to open a discussion in an impersonal way, and still to convey the impression that one is keenly interested. A study of the detachment affected or felt by some lecturers suggests that to an audience some impersonal tones may be indistinguishable from contumely.

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It is useful to discriminate between different types of discussion important in social life. Here are a few : discussion (a) between experts upon different aspects of the same subject, (b) between an expert and a novice or novices, (c) between an inexpert group-leader, perhaps only "one chapter ahead," and his followers, and (d) between people who know only a little about the subject (some politicians call them—not at election times—the "uninstructed public ") but sincerely wish to come to some conclusion. One might mark off and label the various forms of regularized discussion which take place between members of committees,¹ ask professional persuaders to tell us of common snags in their path, and get many types of expert discussers and conversers to write down details of their technique. Ethnologists have described their methods of stimulating discussion among members of more primitive societies. An excellent example is Dr. Ethel J. Lindgren's account of her social relations with the reindeer Tungus tribe.²

Similar hints would be welcome concerning effective methods of stimulating discussions among people much nearer home, yet more formidable or elusive. The technique of opening or participating in discussion varies so much in different social conditions that an " opener " successful in one social group might fail spectacularly in another.

¹ Cf. F. Walser, *The Art of Conference* (London : Pitman, 1933).

² " Field Work in Social Psychology." *British Journal of Psychology*, October 1935.

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In this chapter "discuss" covers the friendly to-and-fro conversation directed upon a single subject as well as controlled exchange of ideas in the formal group, with all conceivable transitions between these two extremes. Many problems are common to both these extremes, while some are limited to one of them.

A few will now be indicated. It would be interesting to study, in any particular instance, how and by whom conversation is opened, whether directly or indirectly. How is the *vis-à-vis* brought to the point, overtly or covertly? Students of social behaviour tell us that successful vendors of horses, and in some countries arrangers of marriages, lead up to the subject by a string of allusions. Do these follow a detectable pattern? What are the different ways of humouring a friend with whom one is compelled, in honesty, to disagree? They are certainly used by experts in tact. How do they decide when to use sympathy, firmness, politeness, warm, tepid, or frigid; humour, light or heavy? Is there, in England, an identifiable "perfect-manner" to indicate disapproval of some one who, while being "ticked-off," is definitely recognized as belonging to the same social group as the reprover? Is this manner useful outside the social circles in which it was perfected?

How do experts keep the conversation directed upon a certain theme? When it drifts, how do they bring it back? How do they end a discussion, subtly or unnoticeably? Where, how, and from whom did they learn the "lubricating phrases" used in many social

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groups when one feels compelled to oppose, to interfere with, or to frustrate the desires of others ; phrases like "I wonder if . . ." "Would you mind very much . . ." "I'd love to . . . but," and "I hate to . . . but" ? Some tactful experts are polyglot. Can they translate such phrases satisfactorily into other languages ? In many cases such an emollient phrase is translatable into the language of "A," but not into the language of "B," though "A" and "B" may be adjacent countries. Even in different parts of England it is wise to employ special phrases and speech-melodies for discussion in groups. The reasons for this would be interesting to record.

After finding discussers with more than average awareness of their success or failure, and unusual insight concerning the causes for these, one might ask them why a technique which grips one group of hearers may amuse or repel another. Very complex must be the state of affairs when a speaker antagonizes a small section of his audience, which, however, acts upon the remainder as a powerful lever of unrest. There is, too, a problem produced by the type of speaker who convinces his hearers intellectually but not emotionally, so that after he has finished talking they feel no impulse to put his exhortations into action. Mr. Arthur Ransome relates that an old lady refused to read one of Mr. George Bernard Shaw's books any further, saying, "While you are reading he convinces you, but, of course, as soon as you stop, you know he's all wrong."

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Schools, both elementary and secondary, might render democracy a great service if pupils were taught not only to write and to speak lines of poets and dramatists, but to clothe their own thoughts in socially effective spoken words. In *The Psychology of Effective Speaking* it is suggested that children might be taught to describe, expound, persuade, differ, and argue *orally*.

In the spirit of "better late than never," it is proposed that adults could acquire these abilities if they "gave their minds to" such learning, were not afraid of ridicule, were freed from the inner obstacles to learning, described on pages 46 to 63, and could find teachers willing to help them. Probably these would need some special preliminary training. The subject-matter of their thoughts would be not only actual objects, but remembered or imagined ones, ideas, beliefs, and points of view, including both those which the pupils hold and those to which they are antagonistic. They should learn how to describe without criticizing, even implicitly. When criticizing, they should make clear how far the views they express are commonly held, and how far they represent merely the speaker's own likes and dislikes.

As a result of such training, pupils might distinguish between different methods of criticism, and discover the use and limitations of parody, burlesque, caricature, and humour. They might be taught to make a statement without identifying their self-esteem with the assertion, *e.g.* when expounding a point of view which they do not hold, or describing it at second hand. Towards the

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acquisition of important skills like these, little direct progress can be made by learning how to write essays in approved style, or to make fun of one's opponent in the debating society.

This last-named pattern of thought-exchange in schools, the debate, is a complex problem. It is significant that debating societies usually avoid discussing physics and chemistry. The members, knowing something about these subjects, display a decent modesty when they are mentioned. The subjects chosen for debate are those about which most people freely express opinions—for example, maternity, examinations, architecture, crime, polygamy, state control of medicine, aristocracy (I copied these from a university diary which lay at hand). Now, to be of any value, discussion of all these matters requires considerable knowledge. Moreover, many of them are apt to provoke hot blood. Why are such themes chosen ? The answer is usually that they are interesting, that fun can be got out of them, that they all relate to questions which have two sides, and that they encourage the shy speaker. In this summary I have not caricatured the arguments of the very sincere headmaster who put them before me. Yet are not the subjects chosen for school debates often just those in which a school which trained for citizenship would have given some direct teaching ? In such a school these themes might then be deemed unsuitable for debate because their complexity was more fully appreciated. What do masters and pupils in schools think of their own debates ? In a school

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magazine, under the heading, "The Entertainments," is an excellent account of a debate on the motion "That Broadcasting tends to foster Laziness"; a motion which, though broadly expressed, is free from many objections mentioned above. After the report of the debate, there is the comment: "With each debate the quality of the speaking improves, and this year those who took part spoke up as if they were really convinced of what they were saying." This suggests that in one school at least debate is honestly treated as an entertainment. Perhaps it is so regarded at most educational establishments. Then it cannot also be cited as a valuable direct preparation for citizenship. A boy who "stars" in to-day's school debate and to-morrow's school comedy may be laying good foundations for citizenship, but in a well-planned house is the entire ground floor devoted to the smoking-room? If democracy is doomed, it does not matter if teachers and professors are content to allow vital questions to be bandied about in debate, for when their pupils grow up they will not be consulted by their rulers. But what if democracy is not doomed?

We need spend little time upon the argument that debating trains one to see both sides of a question. Most important questions are not two-sided, but polyhedral, or knotty. When mangled for purposes of debating, like all products of the mangle they naturally appear to be flat.

Exclusively attacking or defending one side of a subject, unless done very occasionally, is a bad practice. Perhaps

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its case, as compared with the difficulty of many other forms of discussion, is one of its least desirable features.

A pleasing variant of debate can be seen in certain weekly publications. Large pieces are cut off from a previously "flattened" subject. One side only of each piece is then attacked in a crisp paragraph. The writer gives the impression of always being able to hit the nail on the head. Well he may ; it is usually big enough.

Mr. Edward W. Fox has written two articles¹ contrasting the methods of debate with those of discussion. He refers to the conduct of the business of the Society of Friends. It "gives practical expression to that integrating proclivity which is fundamental to the spirit of Quakerism, and which produces the comprehensive social service of Friends." He points out that the highly developed system of debating forms the main basis of any training in public argument which is provided at present. It directs discussion in Parliament, local council chambers, all political organizations, and most voluntary societies. Many societies, both in and out of universities, exist solely to develop the technique of debate and to obtain the supposed benefits it affords.

Mr. Fox then enumerates some of the fallacies underlying a belief in the value of debate as a way of settling

¹ "Discussion versus Debate," *The Friend*, December 15, 1933 ; and "Discussion the Basis of Action in Human affairs," *Quarterly Examiner*, Fourth month, 1935.

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things. (I have taken the liberty of summarizing and slightly paraphrasing them.)

1. The method is based on the assumption that man is a rational being, and underestimates the irrational factors in his mental make-up.
2. Those who advocate the debate-method assume that even in profound matters this half irrational being can balance the "pros" and "cons" of a matter so as to arrive at a proper decision.
3. Debating may produce controversial speech-habits. They may become fixed, especially in the successful debater, and in any "transfer" from the debating society to other less desirable spheres such as business, the home, or small committees.
4. In debate, thinking tends to be based, not upon a strict and honest effort to find truth, but upon a desire to beat the opponent. Debate accentuates differences and gives them an antagonistic flavour, where differences ought to be a source of interest, and their discussion should increase sympathy and knowledge.
5. A most disastrous practice is that of debating resolutions *in vacuo*, for the sake of the verbal conflict, and with no responsibility concerning the result. This attitude may destroy the debater's balance and capacity to give and take when matters of real importance, *e.g.* in the local council chamber, are before him.

Mr. Fox ends by pointing out that the characteristics

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of the war-mentality are observable in this method of verbal conflict. "Deceit and subterfuge, dishonesty and insincere chivalry, are used persistently."

The chief objection to the debate is its fundamental dishonesty. If the debating attitude transfers to discussions in ordinary life, the result is flagrantly bad, and if the attitude is "insulated," so to speak, the case for its retention as a training for serious life falls to the ground. With its disappearance, too, would vanish another possibility. Knowledge that a debating society exists in his school may salve the conscience of a head teacher when he thinks that more might be done to produce useful citizens while they are still pupils.

The outside world ought to be unsympathetic to the plea, whether it comes from a school or from a university, that debate is a good way of introducing pupils to a dull subject. It takes two to make a dull subject, and the lion's share in this performance is often borne by the expositor. Whatever the meaning of "dull" may be, we do not introduce children to the fundamentals of Latin or mathematics by inciting them to debate whether nouns ought to have genders, or which law the transmission of sound ought to follow.

There are further objections to debate. The prospect of being made to look foolish by the possessor of a sharp tongue will discourage a man from getting up and saying a few sentences, even if he may be the only available possessor of relevant first-hand knowledge. In constructive discussion he could give his information, indicate

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where it supports or refutes opinions so far expressed, and then sit down, knowing that he has made a positive contribution.

Again, people who might be most valuable members of a real discussion society may regard the debating society with distrust or contempt. This is the opinion of one experienced ex-President of a University Union.

The argument that debate makes dull subjects interesting is double edged, for to make such subjects interesting as debating material may involve bringing them into contempt as well as obscuring their issues. Debate has sometimes even been used deliberately for the purpose of ridicule.

A consideration seldom appreciated is that a show of hands does not necessarily solve a problem. A division often leaves an unsatisfied and disgruntled minority, which, like minority nations, may claim that it was never beaten fairly.

There are, of course, several alternatives to the method of debate. In attempting to frame one, the question of interest must not be forgotten. More difficult than the creation of interest is a problem raised by some debaters who admit the dishonesty of their technique ; how can one preserve in discussion the humour which is alleged to be an imposing characteristic of debate ?

Here I run the risk of appearing in the rôle, not of a kill-joy, but of the earnest innocent inquirer who so often draws the fire of professional jokers by daring to ponder upon the nature of that sacrosanct, unanalysable product

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of civilization, English humour. I beg leave to be sceptical about the alleged facts, having asked a fair number of people if they think that modern English debates produce much humour. Usually their answers were uncomplimentary to the debaters.

The clogging effect of humour in debate is illustrated when a humourless speaker who has unique knowledge of the subject is opposed by a humorous one with no special knowledge, or one who in the debate deliberately displays much less knowledge than he possesses, since otherwise he could not be humorous. Mr. P. G. Wodehouse often simulates an ignorance of branches of knowledge, the names of which drip very exactly from his pen. It makes one suspect that he may even have dipped into books to which he refers with such artless detachment.

In England humour is used as a weapon of offence and of defence. The former function is seen when the humorist selectively describes the opponent's concept or policy, and then with a sudden twist compares it with something more familiar, orthodox, or normal. This produces in most hearers the comfortable impression that the new idea is slightly ludicrous and clearly unnecessary.

In the type of discussion I have in mind such humour would seldom be welcome, since it would provoke requests for clearer exposition. In a discussion, words like science, reactionary, loyalty, freedom, propaganda ; even that pellucid term, de-bunk, would be examined more carefully, since no progress could be made unless

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their meaning was agreed upon. In a debate it is often to the advantage of the opponents not to invite each other to define terms.

Mr. Fox has described two alternatives to debate, both of which he has tried. The first is a development of the procedure adopted in small groups, but fitted to the needs of large-scale public discussion. It has already succeeded in one or two Students' Unions, in a modified form at a Congress of the National Union of Students, and in other groups. Mr. Fox emphasizes that the method has been evolved by its projectors and not formulated and applied without careful experiment. The following account is paraphrased from the two articles mentioned above.

There are three main participants. First, the chairman. He is entirely free to attend to the order of the meeting, and to stimulate and direct discussion when necessary. A large meeting may number between fifty and four hundred. Next, the leader of the discussion. His point of view should be keenly and definitely presented so as to arouse the enthusiasm of the audience. His speech is spontaneous, differing in this respect from the traditional "motion." This allows qualifications to be made, and is free from many of the omissions which characterize the ordinary debate. The third chief member is the "summer-up." His function is to elicit from the meeting the opinion, if any, which results from the discussion. He may embody this in a resolution which he must declare before he sums up.

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He does not put a motion to the meeting unless he considers that something definite has come out of the discussion. This provision is to ensure so far as possible that all members understand the motion upon which they are asked to vote.

These three are the "platform elements" in the discussion. It has been found advisable to appoint some one on "the floor" who will rise, immediately the leader has made his twenty-minute speech, and begin the discussion. This breaks the usual awkward pause. Those who speak from the floor may speak twice, for ten and five minutes respectively. This allows for the enlivening cross-talk, which is a great attraction in ordinary debate.

"Such subjects as Communism, and the Functions of a University, which are practically impossible to put into a motion without obscuring them, have been discussed with great profit in this way."

The summing-up may be simply an enumeration of the points which have arisen, if they all lead to one factor or opinion. It may be a demonstration of the reasons for voting in one way or another. But it may also be a creative development of the discussion, registering some new idea which has grown out of the exchange of opinions. Thus it gives scope to persons of originality, imagination, and special knowledge. They benefit by attending the discussion, and can pass on their gains to the less original minds. The discussion, therefore, will not tend, as the modern debate does, to choke-off many of the best people.

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The second alternative to debate is much simpler. It is a public conversation between two people. A *sine qua non* is that those discussing must prepare their subject beforehand. They need not do this in detail, but should have decided at least who is to begin, how the second speaker is to be brought into the discussion, and upon what proposition they shall finish.

Since the publication of Mr. Fox's articles, listeners have heard several unrehearsed radio debates. In the writer's opinion the best, before this page was written, was that between Professor Harold Laski and Mr. Robert J. G. Boothby, M.P., on the subject "That a Second Chamber is neither necessary nor desirable." Good features were the recognition by each speaker of the possibility of compromise, and the almost entire absence of "mere" debating points.

Those who believe in democracy agree that if it is to survive there must be a heightened awareness in the ordinary voter, not only of the meaning of democratic freedom but also of the steps necessary to preserve it. Such thinking leads inevitably to the concept of training for citizenship ; apart from any opinion that training in citizenship of a particular kind is or is not regarded as desirable.

The recent book by Sir Ernest D. Simon and others, *Education for Citizenship in Secondary Schools* (Oxford University Press, 1936), issued under the auspices of the Association for Education in Citizenship, is a basis for the arguments to be developed here. However, they

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ought not to be regarded as applicable only to children of school age and to university students, but to any one who still has the zest for new knowledge.

In the above-mentioned book are excellent chapters upon the aims and theories of education for citizenship, the problems of transfer of training, the moral approach to citizenship, the effect of bias and dogma, and the methods by which citizens may be best taught subjects like history, geography, economics, politics, English, classics, modern languages, mathematics, science, and art. The series is suitably rounded off by treatments of clear and accurate thinking. Yet in estimating this book's probable usefulness I would like to urge one consideration. Throughout its pages emphasis is laid upon the importance of showing the future citizen how to obtain accurate information, how to think clearly, how to make right judgments with regard to men and affairs, and how to select his leaders. Few details are given about the technique of training leaders ; usually, indeed, the citizens under discussion are assumed to be led.

Now, most of the immediate social adjustments necessary between groups in a democratic community rest ultimately upon the fact that some individual *speaks* either to another or to a group of others, to express suggestions, wishes, or commands. Hence, if such adjustments are to be made amicably, suitable conversations must take place between two or three individuals, and discussions, a specialized form of conversation, between members of a group or groups.

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Discussions which have a serious aim, and take place between people who are of different opinion at the outset, are not always well done. This is not to be wondered at, since success in such discussion implies the establishment of very delicate relationships between human beings. I would suggest, therefore, that to aim at training for citizenship without training in discussion is likely to achieve only partial efficiency. The result may be like that of a machine with a slipping clutch, or with gear-wheels which engage with each other only by chance. This out-of-gear condition of our great educational machine ought to be more clearly perceived. How many readers were pupils at schools or colleges in which they were trained to discuss as many of them were trained to swim, to throw a ball, to handle a bat or rifle? Weapons, one might suppose, should not come into play until discussion has been tried and failed. Our civilization, in teaching the use of weapons first, has chosen the easier task.

It is possible to wonder if first-class honours graduates in English would be, as a class, better at oral discussion than those who have taken "firsts" in other subjects. In some universities it seems legally possible for a dumb man to take honours in the English language, though similar laurels would not be granted him if, as an Englishman, he offered French or German. The implications of this are worth attention. All over the world "speech" is being studied, yet between the respective fields of the physicists, the phoneticians, and the speech-trainers there

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yawn crevasses sometimes unbridged even by common terminology. Professor A. Lloyd James's *The Broadcast Word*¹ is one of the few books which make clear the necessity for team-work. Many different kinds of people train speakers for purposes (remedial, dramatic, broadcasting, etc.) too varied to be lumped under one descriptive term. Yet few train speakers for discussion.

The so-called "linguistic tests"² have been devised by psychologists who hitherto have done little to relate their work to social issues. Apparently the testers do not always make clear what abilities they are trying to test, or what purposes these powers are supposed to serve in everyday life. Terms like "verbal ability," "linguistic ability," and even "verbality"—a term which seems to need some explaining—are assumed to stand for measurable entities. Yet it might be asked if the testers have distinguished clearly enough between speaking, writing, and understanding language, both spoken and written. Are they measuring ordinary human behaviour, or merely a deformation of such conduct which can be conveniently brought about in the laboratory or classroom? In particular, when referring to the act of speaking, do they make the following distinctions :

I. Expressing one's own thoughts :

- (a) In answer to questions,
- (b) Spontaneously.

¹ London : Kegan Paul, 1935.

² Cf. T. H. Pear, "Are Linguistic Tests Adequate?" *British Journal of Psychology*, Vol. XXV., 1934.

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2. Expressing, approximately, the thoughts of others.
3. Accompanying the emission of sound by gestures, smiles, etc.
4. Doing any or all of these with the definite intention of provoking or answering questions, *e.g.* differing from some one else's opinion in a polite and friendly manner, persuading, or suggesting.

The microphone offers special opportunities for discussion. Now, while some people's natural way of speaking "gets over" on the radio, most professional broadcasters (especially announcers) adopt subtly special ways of speaking. When television comes they will presumably invent special ways of appearing.¹ This suggests once more that in utilizing these new chances of reaching a large number of listeners or viewers the art which conceals art will be a necessity. In short, life has become far too complex for natural discussion to take us very far.

Though this chapter may be read in countries other than England, it is too brief to include any consideration of the requirements of other "culture-patterns." So far as ways of speaking are concerned there are still two Englands: the governing classes and the governed. It cannot escape the attention of any one concerned with public life, as seen in councils, committees, public meetings, lectures, and discussions, that the ruling classes have fitted many of their members for amicable, constructive

¹ Cf. T. H. Pear, "The Mental Effects of Television," *The Listener*, Nov. 4, 11, and 18, 1936.

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discussion. That they are often better at discussion with their equals than with others is beside the point. It is pathetically true that children who have been educated only in the elementary schools are often unable to express themselves in public without embarrassment, tongue-tiedness, or over-compensations which result in failure to retain friendly relations with their audience. A few rise to temporary fame by utilizing the good-humoured ridicule evoked by certain amiable peculiarities. Actually, however, the art of discussion as practised in adulthood or middle age owes little to the elementary schools.

This last paragraph may annoy readers by breaking a taboo against discussing defects in a person's speech.¹ I merely record it as a sociological fact, and ask readers to consider its significance. It is an obvious advantage for those who would like to retain the "two Englands," for it prevents writers and speakers from commenting upon this division. Readers of Professor J. C. Flugel's *The Psychology of Clothes*² know that he broke similar taboos with regard to clothing, and between clothing and speaking there are numerous parallels. I will point out one. Varieties, both of clothing and of speech, may differ in fashionableness, ornateness, and utility. Now, when a poor person's speech is criticized by one who himself speaks easily and well, some may compare this with the sneering of the well-dressed at the poorly clothed ; despi-

¹ T. H. Pear, *Voice and Personality* (London : Chapman and Hall,

² London : Hogarth Press, 1930.

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cable, and if it occurs, to be ignored by decent-minded people. But what if the rich person should note in the poorer one's clothes, not their unfashionableness, but their raggedness and general unfitness to exclude the cold and wet ; is this bad taste ? The answer of course depends upon the intentions in expressing such a judgment. So, too, concerning this question of criticizing others' speech, the issue is obscured by those who believe that a small vocabulary, no practice in public speaking, no chance of talking to people from other social groups, and a strong tendency to over-compensate for feelings of inferiority, are conducive to successful discussion because the total result is recognized as the speech of the " plain man." Perhaps the point need not be argued, as by now the fact that such complicated speaking is learned will be clear.

Until now this chapter has dealt with private discussion between two or three people, or between members of a small group. If, however, education after 25 is to be effective it ought to include some instruction in public speaking. Let us therefore ask, " What characteristics of public speaking are important and desirable ? " Assuming that a teacher has nerved himself to criticize a pupil's methods of carrying on a discussion, even at the risk of having his own dissected in turn, upon what aspects is he to direct criticism ?

It would be wasting time to put forward the numerous points which could be made by a teacher of speech-production, but here are a few suggested additions.

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Has it yet been settled when and in what circumstances short, medium, or long sentences are best for speaking to a group of people? My preference as listener is definitely for the short sentence, yet its blunt, man-to-man form can cover up much shallow thinking and question-begging. A fashionable playwright may use the short snappy sentence in conversation, but it would be impossible for an Einstein or a Freud to express himself adequately, clearly, and honestly in such a way. Moreover, others tell me (I am handicapped by a poor "inward ear") that the ringing oratorical sentence with its poised sections and its dignified rhythm is irresistible to many hearers.

Probably the appropriate technique for each art-form of speech has still to be worked out. Hours of time may be wasted in criticizing radio "talks" which were never talks but essays, competently or incompetently read. Of lectures there are at least three distinguishable forms (didactic, instructional, inspirational) when the lecture is good,¹ and perhaps thirty when it is bad. Even the sermon is developing new forms. Recently I heard a brief explanatory, imperative talk from the pulpit. It seemed to differ little from the directions given by a laboratory demonstrator to a class. I wondered if the effects of these orders upon the older and the younger hearers might be different.

Connected with this is another problem. In opening a discussion, in putting forward a new point of view,

¹ Cf. Sir John Adams, *The Students' Guide*, Chapter VIII. (London).
(4,664)

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particularly if it is likely to be received inimically, what is the appropriate balance, mixture, alternation, or fusion of general statements and concrete examples? Individual differences of listeners certainly exist, *e.g.* one type is extremely bored with and intolerant of resounding generalizations, but likes illustrations from the speaker's own experience. Such a listener may be interested in general statements, yet prefer to read them. Examples, by arousing imagery, may allow him to test the truth of a sweeping assertion. He does not want a talk which consists only of concrete instances, however vivid, but prefers them linked by the truths which they illustrate, or, alternatively, he likes these to be stated deliberately, and followed by illustrations which, offering no difficulty, are given at a faster pace.

There may be people who grasp new generalizations more easily on hearing them. Adult Education classes contain some of this type. During their daily work they are surrounded by people with minds which deal chiefly in personal concrete statements, so that to hear a new general truth stated clearly may give them much intellectual pleasure. Some bad judges of the technique of radio talks may be lecturers, teachers, and university students, used to reading and lucky enough to have the privacy and solitude of a library. They are too ready when saying, "I would rather read than listen," to assume that this is true of others. Once, when asked by a group of university graduates to lecture on a certain subject, I replied that all I knew about it was in an easily

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obtained book. One answered, " But we've forgotten how to read ! "

Speaking should be taken seriously, and regarded as a complex, high-grade skill. At present it is not. In any really democratic social pattern the duty of teaching a child to discuss would seem as important as teaching him to swim or to cross the road.

CHAPTER X

EDUCATION, PROPAGANDA, AND THE ADULT MIND

ANY one who is so naïve as to think that names don't matter, ought to study the history of the word "propaganda" from early days to the present time. Unless he has enjoyed an unusually good classical and historical education, both the look and sound of the word may repel him. Many of us cannot remember when we first heard it used as a popular term, but may suspect that it was during the last war, when it was a derogatory label for reprehensible activities by the enemy. But after 1920, it was clear to the readers of books like Walter Lippmann's *Public Opinion*¹ that London had developed and used propaganda to an extent which had contributed seriously to the final outcome of the war.

As the years roll on, many people like the word no better. Distaste may have been increased by the fact that, until recently with few exceptions, English writers have described propaganda as an entirely evil force, to be stamped out if possible, and, till that succeeds, to be resisted strenuously. It might therefore seem that

¹ New York : Harcourt Brace, 1922.

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education for democracy ought to render the pupil resistant to propaganda as a properly chosen diet in winter should make him proof against the common cold. Certainly, any one who has read Lord Ponsonby's *Falsehoods in War-time*, F. H. Lumley's *The Propaganda Menace*, and Eugen Hadamowsky's *Propaganda und Nationale Macht* may be excused if the consequent queasiness makes him suspect and try to resist all propaganda for a long time. Yet such an attitude has certain serious drawbacks for a responsible citizen, especially if he develops an aloof introversion, distrusting everything, and using his suspicion as an excuse for being enthusiastic about nothing.

A subject towards which an almost cynically sceptical attitude is sometimes taken up is the "Fitter Britain" Movement. At the time of writing this chapter, the Government was freely using propaganda about this cause. This action unloosed a flood of unofficial propaganda, some dignified if obvious, some dishonest, and some comic. A cautious observer of society will remember that this stirring came in the wake of similar movements in dictator-ruled countries, where no attempt was made to hide the chief reason for desiring bodily fitness. Moreover, as usually happens with a nation-wide movement, private organizations and individuals find in it a catapult and upward currents—to use a metaphor from gliding. As a result, the "realist," to the despair of many other serious people, may describe National Fitness as a "racket." He will note that the leaders have

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not defined "fitness"; and about this matter, the physiologist, the army doctor, and the ordinary civilian may hold different views, though all will agree that "physical jerks" and empty stomachs ought not to go together. Posters, newspapers, and radio advertisers assure us that to achieve fitness, beer, stout, cocoa, drink-foods, bread (an afterthought), even insecticides are indispensable. Yet in spite of all this "ballyhoo," it cannot be denied that people are better for being physically fit. So one's mental conflict may go on, and propaganda may seem, at its best, muddle-headed bawling, and at its worst, villainy.

Again, that excellent broadsheet, *Planning*,¹ has stated temperately and politely that our Medical Research Council encourages scientists to find things out, but does little to ensure that ordinary people get to know about these discoveries. The M.R.C., if it were to reply, might reiterate that it is a research council, and that such propaganda may be the job of the Ministry of Health, but, Heaven be praised, it isn't theirs.

These topical examples may show that some forms of propaganda are poisonous and undesirable; others innocuous, even necessary. It is therefore necessary to say what in the present book is meant by the term.

No simple definition is satisfactory. The classical scholar may not object to a word which once designated an agricultural and therefore respectable pursuit, for

¹ Published by Political and Economic Planning, 16 Queen Anne's Gate, London, S.W.1.

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propaganda (Latin, *propagare*) is connected with the art of multiplying plants from layers.¹ Some historians may view the term calmly (though if they deal with the last two decades they ought to feel very uncomfortable about it) for in the seventeenth century "Congregation, or College of the Propaganda," was the official title of a committee of cardinals in charge of foreign missions. Yet, as L. W. Doob says in *Propaganda; its Psychology and Technique*,² "neither philology nor history appears to help its reputation."

Doob's definition, the result of melting together the better examples in "the hundred odd" definitions at his disposal,³ is: "Intentional propaganda is a systematic attempt by an interested individual (or individuals) to control the attitudes of groups of individuals through the use of suggestion, and consequently, to control their actions." Intentional and unintentional propaganda are thus distinguished. Unintentional propaganda is perpetually practised by many people in dominant social positions, who control others' actions by creating suitable attitudes. Many exhortations at school speech-days come under this heading. Even a speaker who thinks he is strongly opposed to propaganda may be unaware of the coercive influences of his own social order.

What are the conscious propagandist's aims? First, to alter people's attitudes ("Eat more fruit," "Come to

¹ *Concise Oxford Dictionary*, 1934.

² New York: Henry Holt, 1935. Page 3.

³ Page 74.

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X for holidays," "See your own country first"); then, to change their habits, values, and sentiments. Here I will follow Doob's discussion of motivation, attitudes, and social values.¹ To know what a man *can* do gives no guarantee of what at a particular moment he *will* do. Mere knowledge in a person represents only potential action. Before he uses this knowledge he must have the urge to use it. The nature of this urge is dual inborn (arising from self-preservative, sexual, and parental "drives"), and acquired. The latter, grafted upon the inborn urges, are powerful factors in making habits and attitudes, and upon these the propagandist works.

"Attitude" describes an individual's pre-existing readiness for some future activity. It is defined by Hadley Cantril as "a more or less permanently enduring state of readiness of mental organization, which predisposes an individual to react in a characteristic way to any object or situation with which it is related."²

An attitude may be "specific," e.g. towards one's neighbour, or general, e.g. towards the French nation. The arousal of an attitude produces a tension within the individual. The strength of this tension will vary with time and circumstances. The same person may have one attitude towards an object in an "institutional" context, i.e. when it is regarded as part of a social institution, and another towards it in a private setting. Many people,

¹ *Propaganda; its Psychology and Technique*, pages 25-50.

² Hadley Cantril, "General and Specific Attitudes," *Psychological Monographs*, v. 42, No. 192, 1932.

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for example, may disapprove State regulation of gambling, but practise it privately.

Doob seems to regard a sentiment as a special case of an attitude. This fusion of meanings has its drawbacks, especially if we accept Professor William McDougall's definition of a sentiment as an organized system of emotional dispositions grouped round the idea of an object.¹ An attitude, presumably, can be aroused and can fade away quickly ; a sentiment, as understood by McDougall, cannot immediately be evoked by a new object. During an international congress, for example, one meets in quick succession members of different nations, and assumes towards them different attitudes which, though partly determined by recognition of their nationality, are influenced by the particular individual's looks, his manners, what he says, and how he says it. One's sentiment for the nation to which any single person belongs may be unaltered by a chance exception.

An opinion, according to Doob, is the expression of an attitude. It need not correspond to the attitude which it is supposed to express. For example, if A, whose attitude towards B is unfavourable, is asked by C to express his opinion of B, he may give a misleading answer, because he may find it hard to put into words his feelings about B, whether favourable or unfavourable, he may think that his private attitude towards B is not C's business, or he may not wish to seem vindictive.

Attitudes are often so mutually interrelated and

¹ *Introduction to Social Psychology* (London : Methuen, 1908).

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integrated that the propagandist may be trying to change not an attitude but a person. A "central attitude" commonly forms the core about which others are integrated. An obvious example is religion. There are also non-central attitudes, less closely related to the higher integration of the personality. These are termed, by Professor F. H. Allport, *segmental*.¹ To a studious person, for example, card-playing may seem not wicked but just tedious. He may not integrate this attitude into his character so seriously that he tries to dissuade others from playing, yet in so far as this attitude debar him from making friends with hearty people (who are apt to play cards), it may alter his personality. Thus, though segmental, it may function almost as powerfully as if it were central.

The chief techniques of propaganda, as applied to "news" or information, are suppression, colouring, creating, distorting, and failing to specify the source. Even items of "straight news," if selected from a list of world events, can have a propagandist effect, for between omission and suppression there are infinite gradations. The selection of items in this chapter may appear to some readers to have a propagandist motive. "Education to counteract propaganda," or even "propaganda against propaganda" have been advocated, but the matter is not so simple, so far as education in schools is concerned.

What should be the attitude of educated people

¹ *Institutional Behaviour*, pages 65ff. (Chapel Hill, 1933).

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towards propaganda ? It is luxurious, and dangerous, to assumed complete detachment, to be impervious to any exhortation, to read and listen to no message above a whisper, and to describe as a " racket " any movement which tries to get something done. This frame of mind is sometimes called austere or academic, though other less polite adjectives have also been applied to it.

In the last few years excellent books on the general subject of " Thinking Clearly " have appeared. Particularly worthy of mention are R. H. Thouless's *Straight and Crooked Thinking*, G. C. Field's *Prejudice and Impartiality*,¹ R. W. Jepson's *Clear Thinking*, and L. Susan Stebbing's *Logic for Use*. Their lessons are valuable to all who wish to be as free as possible from the yoke of propaganda.

A few suggestions might perhaps be made here. When important information is received, try to discover its source. Ask yourself, " Was it given by some one who backs it with his name ? Who is he ? Is he specially qualified to speak or write about it ? " (This information, unfortunately, is not always helpful, since a person who knows all the facts may have been paid to present a consciously biased selection of them.) " Do the pieces of evidence which he offers tally with those obtained from other experts ? Do I, for personal reasons, *want* to believe this or that statement ? "

Keep in mind the effect of emotionally " coloured " words ; remembering that words are seldom used with

¹ London : Methuen.

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emotionally neutral meanings, except by scientists, and not always by them. Yet at the time of writing, it matters a great deal whether the Government troops in Spain are referred to under that designation or as "loyalists," "Reds," or Bolsheviks, or whether their opponents, correctly described as rebels, are also termed insurgents, militarists, "anti-Reds," patriots, or Nationalists.

One way of lessening personal suggestibility to propaganda is to accept only with the greatest reluctance a "descriptive" name for a person or a movement if one cannot be sure what it means. Industrial psychology, for example, which is now about thirty years old, employs many kinds of investigators, but, whatever their aims, they are often incorrectly called "efficiency engineers" or "motion-study experts." There is a common tendency, even amongst scientists, to call anybody who tries to improve another's mental condition a *psycho-analyst*, and as a consequence, when the fantastic surmises of some psycho-analysts are given wide publicity, psycho-therapists in general, and even psychologists, are credited with them.

While considering propaganda, it is valuable to remind oneself that while a scientist may correctly estimate the validity of the facts in his own sphere of study, he may not have studied social values ; of which, indeed, he is often a bad judge. Propaganda by a scientist, therefore, may deserve little more credence than propaganda by any one else.

CHAPTER XI

BROADCASTING AND ADULT EDUCATION

DISCUSSIONS of education from the different points of view of the teacher, the taught, the examiner, and the examinee are usually dominated by the assumption that ability to read and write are all important. This may be true, but in an educated person something else is desirable. If the general behaviour of those brought up in cultured, leisured surroundings be compared with that of less fortunate but equally intelligent people, the difference is noticeable, not so much in their writing (either in its legibility or its message) as in their manner, and manners, of speaking.¹ Since the give-and-take of cultured society is usually through speaking, which is nowadays one of the most important signs of personality, it would be hypocrisy to pretend that the development of speech can be safely left to chance.

During the last ten years reception of knowledge through the ear has become immeasurably important. Far from believing something because it is in the newspaper, as their grandfathers are said to have done, many people are now more likely (when in England) to believe

¹ Ample evidence for this may be found all through *Learn and Live*.

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it because it is in the news bulletin. Even the accusations of partiality made against the framers of the B.B.C.'s news reports are often couched in terms so one-sided as to support instead of destroying the belief that these reports are usually impartial.

We are now a nation of radio-listeners. It is not always deplorable that we cannot interrupt or answer back. Sometimes interrupters are not worth hearing, and any adult who finds it impossible to hold his tongue for twenty minutes has been badly brought up. Some printed descriptions of "passive sponges listening to the radio" seem insincere if they imply that, in contrast, readers of newspapers are detached and critical. In suburban trains, trams, and tubes, many passive sponges can be seen absorbing snippets doled out by the Press magnates.

Even if listeners could answer back, many of their efforts would be unsuccessful. They might be so cluttered up with "I mean," "you see," "you know," "of course," "if you understand me," to say nothing of expletives, grumbles, whines, and insults, that their message would be lost even if the audience had the patience to listen. Not every Lancastrian has Gracie Fields's directness, and many Yorkshiremen do not achieve the blunt straightness of J. B. Priestley. In differing with others straightness is not everything.

Never was this brought home to me so vividly as at a public meeting where simple workers were expressing resentment at unfair treatment by a local authority.

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One heard brief, direct phrases, but it was from the lawyers and councillors. The confused, meandering sentences, the "er—er's," the occasional polysyllables wrongly used, came from the simple people, and naturally their lack of success annoyed them. Several times the chairman could justifiably have called them to order, but refrained because he knew their handicaps. Few, indeed, can express subtle issues in simple words without training in the art which conceals art.

In his *Radio is Changing Us*,¹ page 18, Mr. David Cleghorn Thomson says :

"In an early contribution to the *Radio Times*, G. K. Chesterton expressed the view that it was a good thing indeed for the masses to listen to the words of the late Lord Curzon. It would have been equally good if his lordship could, by means of radio, have listened to the voice of the people. The amplification of this point is obvious. It is not only salutary for Poplar to listen to the voice of Park Lane, but for Bayswater to listen to the Island of Barra."

A good point, but is the statement quite adequate ? If Lord Curzon had broadcast few listeners would have found it difficult to comprehend him, for to express oneself clearly is often a result of the type of university education which he had enjoyed. He, moreover, had faithful, erudite secretaries, who could have helped him

¹ London : Watts, 1937.

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to draft his speech simply. One is less confident about the success of the influence of the simple speaker of Barra—even of Barrhead, Ballyclare, Bootle, or Bermondsey—upon the typical inhabitant of Bayswater, and the failure, if it occurred, could not be blamed entirely upon the dwellers in Bayswater. Something more than simple speech—though that is hard enough to achieve—is required, for success in speaking usually implies a *vis-à-vis* willing not only to listen but to continue listening. High ability in addressing people outside one's own geographical and social group, so that they are not repelled, or antagonized, but wish to understand, is given to few. Though it can be learned, it is seldom taught. In an article: "Speech and Adult Education," in *Adult Education* for September 1937, Mr. Clive Sansom writes :

"Mr. Aldous Huxley has confessed his failure in the distressed areas. As soon as he spoke, he said, he placed a barrier between himself and the people he wanted to understand."

Just because speaking is so difficult for most people, a broadcasting corporation is highly privileged. Its contributions to adult education are specially interesting, since by offering spoken information, its example may cause some listeners to enrich their own ways of speaking and make them more flexible.

Criticism of the B.B.C.'s matter and manner, however, is made difficult by the fact that there seems to have been premature consent concerning the names by which the

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various art-forms of speech shall be distinguished. The fare is offered under the titles : lectures, talks, discussions, debates, conversations, interviews, "cock-pits." Perhaps few would object to these classifications, but they are sub-sections of a greater distinction which seems arbitrary and irksome. All these efforts are labelled "educational." Non-educational or incidentally educational items appear to be regarded as entertainment, and are in fact, provided by people with an outlook on life very different from that officially expressed in the Talks Department. Yet in actual experience are these distinctions so obvious ? At the risk of being misunderstood by friend and foe, by the most academic colleague and the most ribald crony, I would plead for a bigger leavening of incidental humour in broadcast talks on serious subjects.

I am never sure if I like shrimp sauce. Shrimps, yes, but the nutritious mucilage around them is tiresome, and the sauce is not compensated for by the fifty-two religions which, according to the Frenchman, characterize the English. You may dissent, yet agree that shrimps in sauce should, though they usually don't, flavour their environment. I feel like this about humour in a talk ; it ought to permeate the whole discourse.

This question first presented itself when, on the way home from an international congress, I was discussing with a young American philosopher my impression, which he shared, that the words uttered publicly by his compatriots in the gay Continental city we had left, had been not only serious, but solemn. Before the whole assembly,

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a German had deliberately laid four-square foundations and erected several floors of a *Witz* so erudite that we could not but admire. The American might have made the same joke in one-tenth the time, but he hadn't chosen to. Moreover, said he, many Americans resent any humour in a serious address, and regard the Englishman's modest efforts at warming-up as rather fatuous. After all, he argued, if you have crossed the world to listen to a speaker, he can assume that you will be interested. (Here I thought that he confused what should be with what, alas, so often is.) In short, said he, if you want humour, go to a music-hall, take down a funny book, laugh at a "movie" actor, or a radio voice specially hired, and, more important, indicatively labelled. Yet was it not an American, William James, with whom a student once pleaded, "But, professor; to be serious for a moment . . ."?

Do you and I want our radio talks to be classified rigidly as non-serious and serious? Opening the *Radio Times* at "What is your choice this week?" I see that in the compartment "Talks and Readings," "Great Religious Revivals" lies happily alongside "Mark Twain," and "Paste and Paper" leads one without a jolt to "Responsibilities of Empire." "Light Music," but not "Light Talk," has its own special section. It might seem, therefore, either that the B.B.C. does not wish to serve up its talks in distinctive wrapped cartons like foods at a delicatessen counter, or that it frowns upon *hors-d'œuvres* and kickshaws. Is this true?

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Here is another question. There is an interesting difference between serious and solemn talks. According to the *Concise Oxford Dictionary*, serious means "earnest ; not frivolous, reckless, or given to trifling ; not ironical or jesting." Solemn is "accompanied by ceremony ; mysteriously impressive ; slow in movement ; affecting gravity." Excitedly endeavouring to learn the derivation of such impressive words, I am rewarded in both cases with the remark, *Etym. dub.*, which is concise at any rate.

Now, is there a general preponderance of desire for seriousness in radio talks ? And, if so, is incidental humour allowed to accompany that seriousness, or is humour best kept to those parts of the programme in which the performer's name leads the listener to expect it ? If that is agreed, could not more openly, unfurtively amusing talks be arranged ?

These thoughts came to me after attending the excellent conference on talks which the B.B.C. held with a hundred and fifty guests at Leeds in 1937. The moment the chairman's eye was catchable—and it possessed this quality in a high degree—visitors leapt up everywhere. Their speeches were excellent and their opinions pleasantly varied, except upon one point ; the topics for which they asked were all serious. Nobody seemed to want light talks, related to the other kind as omelettes to joints, or as Yorkshire pudding to beef. And though good Yorkshire pudding is as light as a Barrie play, in its native county it is served and dismissed before the beef appears.

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Now, possibly at Leeds we were not a random sample of England's listening population. We were North-country by birth or by achievement, and therefore an earnest lot. Excellent, yet I wonder if another part of England would have provided such a solemn atmosphere. I don't mean that there were no jokes, but those I remember came from a speaker who makes them professionally.

One newspaper critic's comment upon the solitary plea made at the Congress for occasional lighter talks was, "I don't want a talk to be a set of wisecracks." To this one might reply that, though Henry James warned us that the United States would soon be gleefully romping amid the ruins of the English language, he probably never dreamt that America would so easily conquer the independent Northerner. Have things gone so far that even an English professional writer must use the word "wisecrack" for anything that makes a human being smile ?

Yet the incidental humour flavouring a talk is often remembered. I recall a friendly, discursive radio talk, given years ago, on odours and their power to evoke emotions from the past. The speaker remarked casually that in his club a cavalry officer had said that a certain odour reminded him of his mother's withdrawing-room. The talker commented, "Now, I believe that delicate, introspective description of smells is unusual behaviour in a cavalry officer," or words to that effect. And one Sunday afternoon, a day on which one hardly

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expects rollicking humour from one's loudspeaker, we smiled again and again as a speaker described some of the parish priests he had known half a century ago.

I, for one, would like more light talks like Max Beerbohm's. But he is in Rapallo. Still, it might be worth while to fetch him over fairly often to encourage the others.

It is pleasant to record the many good marks given to the B.B.C.'s educational programmes. Their matter is usually solid, trustworthy, documented, and spoken by an expert; often by the person responsible for the discoveries or opinions described. Furthermore, few educational broadcasts are anonymous. Opinions are attributable to the individual who expresses them, and indeed "indiscretions" are seldom shielded. It is interesting to imagine the results if all newspapers, especially those of the baser sort, were to adopt this practice.

A question sometimes asked is: ought the B.B.C. in arranging talks to aim chiefly at offering material which cannot be obtained from books? Mr. Cleghorn Thomson asks, "Do they (the B.B.C.) consider (radio) primarily as a medium for reproducing other types of art?" On this subject, Mr. John Grierson, the film producer,¹ says, "The substance of the talks I can, with greater benefit, read in books." The *Manchester Guardian's* radio critic, examining the B.B.C.'s presentation² of radio talks, complains that in them there is too much information,

¹ Quoted in *Radio is Changing Us*, pages 96-97.

² August 17, 1937.

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too little personality, and too little assumption of any "background" in the listener.

These criticisms, if justified, are extremely important. A great deal of what the listener hears could be read in middle-page articles in some dailies, or in essays in some weeklies and monthlies—if the reader is wealthy or lives near a well-stocked library. The other day, realizing that I had neglected one of our older "monthlies" of late, I discovered that three consecutive copies of it would cost more than a year's listening licence. The B.B.C. indeed might reply to the criticisms that any one able to join the London Library, spend a pound a week on periodicals, and employ a secretary to mark passages to be read, *could* read the substance of a fraction of the talks they supply. If, however, Mr. Grierson is meaning to urge that many more talks ought to deal with matters which are not yet in books, I should certainly agree.

All the above remarks, however, refer to the matter of the talks, not to their manner. Whether the listener wants to, or if he ought to hear every point laboriously hammered in, every loose end deliberately knotted, before he is allowed to proceed, is a matter of taste. If the function of the talks is disciplinary or corrective, something may be said for this view; if they are meant to be attractive, the ideas offered may be too solid. Perhaps they were never intended to entertain, except incidentally, during attempts to educate.

This does not suggest that the B.B.C. is lacking in devotion to its duty towards the listening public; rather

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that it conceives that duty more narrowly than it used to. Occasionally, as C. E. Montague says, it may be more blessed to guess than to be told ; especially over the radio.

Leaving the question of solo talks, it may be remembered that good conversation is a form of speech activity in which the artistic aspect is always likely to be prominent. Many would prefer listening to good broadcast conversation to reading a newspaper, however well printed, looking at a magazine, however well illustrated, and—let us forestall bright interpolations—to sitting in a pub, however poetic.

Any one living among intelligent, travelled, cultured, charming, and witty people of all ages and both sexes, who habitually converse in his presence, need not bother with the following page. Another kind of reader, however, whom, at the moment, I visualize, is not rare. He lives in a dull place and knows its inhabitants' opinions only too well. He has seldom or never used a passport. He is more interested in people than in things ; and, since he loves his fellow men, a good conversation may delight him at least as much as a symphony. The time and place to appreciate the attractions of listening to conversation are a wet night in a country cottage ; not when one lives near a cinema, dance hall, or bridge-playing friends, though even these magnets fail to draw some people away from their radio sets. The give-and-take of conversation ; the tossing of the ball across the net, not always ended by "smashes" ; the probability

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that at any moment a new idea may unexpectedly change the course of thought ; all these are special attractions. There is, too, the pleasing possibility that the speakers may be intellectually, aesthetically, or otherwise contrasted. Age, sex, nationality, social class, and occupation, all offer foundations for contrasts in conversation, and it is reasonable to want more conversations and more contrasts. If we get them, millions will be able to hear friendly people differing, exploring each other's enthusiasms, and exchanging opinions in a civilized way.

Tastes differ, and many listeners may like the "cockpit," when each contributor reads, often with no little solemnity, his considered judgment on an important matter. Though to call a collection of respected citizens a cockpit seems scarcely courteous, the idea may be entertaining. It is doubtful, however, for obvious reasons, if this way of arranging a bouquet of talent will survive television.

It would seem that more persistent experiment might profitably be made with the interview. Up to now it seems to have appeared chiefly in programmes like "In Town To-night," where it was often effective, though at times a condescending note in the interviewer's voice, and even an inference from the interviewer's manner that he was not quite familiar with the answers, have invited easy parody.

During the last five years I have often heard a question, "Must all broadcasts begin at mental sea-level?"

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When the B.B.C. answers, it does so with two voices, one, indeed, heterodyning the other. In regard to music, it is always assumed that a listener, let us say, who loves both gardens and musical impressions of them, should be free to hear Ketelbey, and, after a lengthy interval, Delius. Official deafness is inevitable towards any Ketelbey lover who might complain that Delius was difficult; this would merely be regarded as well-deserved homage. Foundations of Music, Bach cantatas, programmes of Strauss, Sibelius, Stravinsky, and Schönberg are broadcast with the full knowledge that in London E.I., or W.I., somebody may be unable to rise to the height which the programme demanded. It is assumed that such a person would find another station, or even switch off.

This official attitude has won praise, in my opinion well deserved, from many critics in other countries, who envy the consistency with which culture has fearlessly been put first. And in the presentation of talks one aspect of this laudable attitude has usually been prominent: sincere regard for educational value; sometimes indeed so dominant and so ubiquitous as to deserve the word "uplift." Yet, excellent as it is to be lifted up, after fifteen years broadcasting ought to do more than merely to raise the listener into his pram, so to speak, and repeat the process next week in a different area of the mental field. If you were to lead a Fen dweller to the tops of the neighbouring church steeples he might at first be grateful for the extended views, but eventually they would put ideas into his head, so that he aspired to

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Snowdon ; even to the Jungfrauoch. There seems to be no indication that the B.B.C. ever intends to take the intellectual climber to a mountaineer's hut, from which, when rested, he may move upwards. The musical climber, on the other hand, has had these facilities for years. Will " B " talks ever be given which build upon knowledge already imparted by an " A " series ? Are controllers of talks paralysed by fear of the unknown listener who, before switching on, has never heard of the subject in question ? The controllers of music have cheerily disregarded him for years. Moreover, a music programme may go on for two hours ; a talk for twenty to thirty minutes. If this paralysis is to continue much longer, the broadcasting authorities of our country will have to admit failure to make progress in the exposition of many, perhaps most, important subjects. To state, even baldly, the implications of an important invention or theory may require twenty minutes. To elaborate the subject might take five or six more talks, and be well worth it. But this is impossible if the policy " descend each night to ' sea-level ' " is adhered to. Music broadcasts often begin from many thousands of feet above sea-level, in a rarefied atmosphere which not every tyro listener can breathe easily. Yet the broadcasts continue, and increase our national prestige.

Sometimes it would be better if certain subjects were not touched at all ; if they are merely to be mentioned, and then " put aside " in a pontifical manner. This jejune handling of civilization's most tragic problem is

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evident on many pages of the broadcast talks, *The Causes of War*.

Mr. Cleghorn Thomson reminds us of Ortega y Gasset's remark in *The Revolt of the Masses*: the characteristic of the hour is that the commonplace mind, knowing itself to be commonplace, has the assurance to proclaim the rights of the commonplace and to impose them wherever it will, adding, "Herein lies yet another of the formidable burdens of our B.B.C. authority, in keeping in the closest touch with democratic demand, not to allow the commonplace to dictate policy and to reduce standards to a dead level."¹

¹ *Op. cit.*

CHAPTER XII

THE MATURE PERSONALITY

SOME minds never mature. Real adults often regard them with contempt or affection, perhaps tinged with envy. The relative strength of these attitudes depends upon the adults' views about the social situations which evoke infantile or youthful behaviour in the "ought-to-have-been-grown-up-long-ago" person.

Whether it be desirable or not, most people's sentiments, opinions, ideals, and consequent behaviour-patterns actually mature at very different rates. Middle-aged savants are often keen about new locomotives or signalling systems; and, perhaps, the hobby of stamp collecting characterizes either youth or extreme age. Not a few professors, speaking to a school sixth form, note the stern disapproval which their enthusiasm for a new idea, or sentimentality about an old one, evokes from some eighteen-year-olds.

Paradoxical as it may seem, professors are expected to maintain poised judgment towards their subject, while remaining pervious to new ideas concerning it, even if practical men think them silly. Professors who close

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this mental porthole sometimes become good business men. Yet Mr. H. G. Wells's description of some dons as "pickled undergraduates" cannot be indignantly rejected, though to discuss the subtle ways in which dons may preserve their immaturity is, fortunately, outside the scope of the present book.

Growing up in the realm of ideas is not like bodily development. The thought of it need involve no fear of mental middle-aged spread, or of puffiness after exercise. It is more like the acquisition of new skills, which are usually assets, and seldom liabilities, in the make-up of one's personality.

How is the maturity of a mind to be judged? Many of us may think that, even if we cannot define it, we can recognize a mature mind as easily as a mature body. Yet in both instances we should perhaps be safe only when judging a type similar to our own. Few modern psychologists have attempted to describe the mature mind. However, just as this book is being finished, a most interesting chapter, "The Mature Personality," appears in Professor Gordon W. Allport's *Personality: a Psychological Interpretation*.¹ Some parts of it will now be discussed, with comments.

The developed person has a variety of self-governing interests. With their aid he can lose himself in work, play, contemplation, or in loyalty to others. He is not self-centred, self-pitying, nor does he prate eternally of self-expression. He is happiest when his interests are

¹ New York: Henry Holt, 1937, pages 213-231.

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focused upon socialized aims compatible with the culture pattern in which he lives. These goals represent an extension of the Self ; the first requirement for a mature personality.

The second factor, a desirable complement to the first, is self-objectification ; that peculiar detachment attained by the mature person when he can survey his pretensions in relation to his actual abilities, his present aims in comparison with possible future goals, his own equipment in comparison with that of his associates, and his estimation of himself in relation to the opinion others hold of him.

A good chance to assess one's degree of mental maturity is offered by the invitation to judge a performance in one's own line, especially if it has excellent qualities which can be praised whole-heartedly, but also has serious faults. If the temptation destructively to criticize these latter is great, and one can find honest reasons for it, they may cast valuable light upon one's own defects.

The capacity for self-objectification is termed by Allport *insight*, though he acknowledges other meanings of this word. Insight is connected with the (? one) sense of humour, which, he says, is almost invariably possessed by a cultivated and mature personality. The way in which such a remark will be received by the reader depends upon the meaning which he attaches to the term "sense of humour."¹ But probably to call any one, in this sense, humorous, implies that he can relate a new and

¹ Cf. the author's *Psychology of Effective Speaking*, pages 148-169.

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disturbing experience to his usual perspective, or sense of proportion, and can even laugh at himself.

There is an opposition between "losing oneself" by vigorous participation in some activity, and contemplating oneself, occasionally with amusement. Consequently, to unify a personality, a philosophy of life is needed. This may or may not be expressed in words, either to oneself or to others : though the effects of being able to state one's beliefs are often very striking, and may save one from the embarrassment which sometimes overtakes the inarticulate at awkward moments.

As Allport suggests, while in many ways the psychologist is unusually well equipped to describe the intricate dovetailing of processes necessary for a mature personality, in other directions he is specially handicapped. This is because many students of the mind (though some compensate for their unusual social surroundings by living, working, or forming friendships with unacademic people¹) move almost exclusively among persons specially trained to use their abilities in limited, even curious ways. It is easy, and wrong, to assume that these represent average personalities, and to "romanticize the situation by compounding a representative personality on too high and subtle an emotional level." We are reminded of the mental limitations to the develop-

¹ Cf. the Austrian investigation by Marie Lazarsfeld-Jahoda and H. Zeisl of the unemployed of Marienthal ; *Die Arbeitslosen von Marienthal* (Leipzig : Hirzel, 1933) ; R. S. and H. M. Lynd's studies of the town of Muncie, Indiana, in *Middletown* (New York : Harcourt Brace, 1929) ; and *Middletown in Transition* (London : Constable, 1937).

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ment of personality ; low intelligence, uncontrolled emotion, childish mentality, " regression " (or a drop back in the face of difficulty to childish ways of thinking, feeling, and acting) ; " stereotypes "—the " pictures in our head " as Walter Lippmann¹ calls them—which we make of Conservatives, Liberals, Socialists, Bolsheviks, Aryans, Radicals, idealists, realists ; even, perhaps, of gentlemen. Unusual suggestibility, too, prevents us from growing up mentally ; a sad thought in these days of tabloid " editorials," advertising, and clever propaganda.

A maturing personality usually extends its sense of self to include others. A most effective extension is falling in love. Perhaps, in the English pattern of society, as we have mentioned, this biologically important process keeps many young people out of adult education classes. Some, indeed, may not wish it to be known that at 26 they are already seeking non-useful education, for then they might be regarded by others as having abandoned all hope of marriage.

As one's personality becomes more mature, a process occurs which William Stern has called *introception* ; other people's interests and values, which at first seemed external to oneself, are incorporated into one's own personal system of motives and desires, where they eventually become driving forces. If a mature person takes this wider, less personal, view of life, guided less by biological needs than by acquired interests, his conversation often reflects it. " It has been said crypti-

¹ *Public Opinion*, 1922.

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cally," observes Allport, "that the sign of cultivation in a man is his ability to talk for half a day without betraying his occupation." Such demonstration of an extended range of interests is not necessarily the pose of superior breeding; if it be sham, it is easy to detect; a solidly constructed system of sentiments, even to an untrained observer, has a very different appearance from the mask of a poseur.

Intelligent clear-sighted planning for the future is always a significant feature of any mature life. Every mature personality, says Allport, travels towards a port of destination selected in advance, or to several related ports in succession, the Ego-ideal always holding the course in view.

"Carefree" is an adjective we apply to the thoroughly happy child. Though there are plenty of exceptions, most children are free from a tendency to self-examination. In adolescence, however, this leaning often is most marked. But in maturity a sensitive and intricate balance is often attained between caring and not caring, between valuing things and seeing the vanity of valuing some of them.

It is not fully recognized by art critics and others that for many people the second best, or even the sham which the critic castigates, may be the only alternative to having nothing at all.¹ Gross psychological misunderstanding is shown by those who ask, "Why should concerts be

¹ An unusually thoughtful essay by a W.E.A. student suggested the inclusion of this section.

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broadcast in a town where people ought to go and hear them ? ” Apart from the fact that such concerts can be heard all over the country, usually a seat cannot be reserved for less than 3s. 6d. ; this ought to be a sufficient answer.

Even some affectations of the “ Tudorbethan ” house are accepted as a second best ; e.g. a leaded diamond pattern on the window-panes is as near as some town dwellers may ever get to having an old house of their own, and, perhaps, the “ diamonds ” save curtains. Deplorable as it may seem to those who desire absolute perfection, this acceptance of the not-quite-so-good may be an important ingredient of ultimate happiness.

With maturity of the intelligent mind comes increasing power to distinguish between the humorous and the comic. The preferred type of humour is objective, based upon impersonal values, and less upon those dictated by one's own repressions, sense of inferiority, jealousy, or unsocial desires. Yet the other night I laughed—and so probably did thousands of radio listeners—at the blend of naïvety, blasé bitterness, and sceptical realism in Ronald Frankau's account of *Macbeth*. Historians, Shakespearians, militarists, or Scotsmen would perhaps have been annoyed or bored by it. Certainly there are humorists at whom, one feels, one ought not to laugh, and does.

We may agree with Allport that in one sense the function of humour resembles that of religion ; it “ sets a frame of reference ” which is not the everyday limited

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one ; it precipitates the ordinary worries and mischances of life into new and sane patterns. Yet a personality cannot be reverent and jesting at the same time ; the core and aim of a religious faith, the ultimate goal of the acts of worship, are beyond the reach of humour.

The view of maturity here proposed will not be accepted by every one. It may be merely an early stage towards a satisfactory concept. Some readers may ask themselves, " If that be maturity, do I want to be quite so mature ? Isn't it dull to think that one is no longer likely to make a fool of oneself, or worse, that if one did, nobody would care ? " With such soliloquies I shall not deal.

Some parts of this book may seem obvious to many. Yet obvious things are sometimes true, and occasionally so important that even a psychologist cannot miss them. And truisms concerning one mind are often very doubtful postulates about another. Since this fact is more often brought home to psychologists than to the general public, it may serve as excuse for the writing of this book.

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